

Belonging Is ...

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The monster in angry mood, towering over Conor in Grandma's sitting room. Illustration © 2011 Jim Kay. From *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness, from an original idea by Siobhan Dowd, illustrated by Jim Kay. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, London SE11 5HJ www.walker.co.uk.

EDITORIAL

The desire to belong is universal; indeed, seems to extend throughout the animal kingdom, as packs or family groups are formed. It is an impetus that is particularly strong among human beings and can apply to a range of areas in society: culture, race, social, gender, age and more – groups by which we define ourselves, some more important than others or which take on importance at different stages in life. Our recent one-day IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference in November 2014 took the theme ‘Belonging is...’ to explore a variety of approaches to the proposition. A number of the papers are now available on the IBBY UK website: www.ibby.org.uk.

This issue of *IBBYLink* also reflects the theme. Belonging – the wish to belong, to have a particular identity that is more than the individual, is a theme that is explored in many novels written for a teenage (or, as now termed, young adult) audience. Indeed, society sees this as a defined group to which one belongs, and young people identify with this. Julia Eccleshare at the IBBY International Congress in Mexico City last year argued that the way young people find the books they want to read is changing; it is no longer the exclusive prerogative of the adult to be the gatekeeper, advisor or curator. Rather, by virtue of ‘belonging’ to a group defined as young adult, they can create their own paths through websites, blogs and tweets – they have a shared language that must surely be one of the most obvious and powerful aspects of belonging.

Isolation and invisibility are the opposites, the feelings that are experienced when one does not belong; or at least does not belong in a group or society in which one is placed.

There are many different aspects to belonging and it is not exclusive. To belong to a family or a race or culture does not necessarily mean belonging in a society. Various aspects of this conundrum are explored by a number of our contributors. Richard O’Neill speaks from personal experience as a Romany, while Aravinda Anantharaman looks at what it is like to be a Tibetan refugee in Nepal and India. However, the feeling of isolation does not just affect those who might most obviously ‘not

belong’. There are situations in everyday life that can lead to profound feelings of isolation; bereavement is one. Though something that can affect everyone at some time, nevertheless it immediately sets that person apart. It gives rise to difficult emotions that may need to be mediated to allow a sense of ‘belonging’ to return.

How can a sense of belonging be fostered and a perception of exclusion or isolation combatted? Books, stories and reading are powerful media. Indeed, they are seen as vital in providing young readers a way to believe that they belong, that they are not invisible. This is the link between all our articles. They all emphasise the way books can provide a sense of a self. Indeed, Richard O’Neill admits that even a stereotype enabled him to feel he existed – not something to be commended, but food for thought. Books (and the stories they contain) allow readers to identify and see themselves. They also allow others, those of the wider group and members of other groups, to see characters who may be different, but should – maybe already do, but unrecognised – belong. Terry Farish in her verse novel *The Good Braider* (2012) highlights some of the problems involved in belonging: both for those who face them and in opening a door to understanding.

How are books that might help to be found? Both the Diverse Voices promotion, a partnership between Seven Stories and Frances Lincoln publishing, and Amnesty International’s *FREE? Stories Celebrating Human Rights* for overcoming barriers are an immediate answer. The articles by Jake Hope and Janice Bland provide information about these particular projects which are designed to help, and their lists should be promoted widely. However, we all belong to another group – the world of readers – and, as Lusekelo Lucas Mwalughelo reminds us, there are many who are excluded. She is passionate in urging all of us privileged to be literate to work to create the bridges that will allow others to belong; and, of course, this is the reason for IBBY’s existence.

Ferelith Hordon

A Longing for Belonging

BELONGING IS ...

Richard R. O'Neill

An interesting word 'belonging', especially as it contains both 'longing', which the dictionary describes as 'a yearning', and 'belong', which it describes as 'a desire to be part of something'.

My belief is that most people have a yearning to belong at some time or other. I know I do and have always done so. However, the problem comes especially for children when they feel, owing to how they look or the culture or the family they were born into (things that are totally beyond their control) excludes them from that belonging.

Looking back to my childhood, I always felt I belonged – to my family, my community and my environment. It was only when that environment changed that I first felt that I no longer belonged.

I was born and brought up in a large traditional Romany family. Travelling around meant stopping in the same places as the family had done for hundreds of years, meeting the same people year on year: customers of my family, friends, and people who loved to hear our stories. The environment that changed my sense of belonging was school. It became clear very quickly that someone who lived in a caravan and spoke with a different accent and used the occasional Romany word did not belong. I don't think that this exclusion was always malicious, often it was simply because teachers and others who should have known better just didn't. They often didn't know what to do with me, there was no category for me, no instruction manual – not that I was that different of course, but they felt I was, and because of that I felt for the first time that I was. There are two main options available in this situation, you can continue to be yourself and stay excluded or you can try and change yourself to fit in, thus leading a double life, neither according to the experts on child development are ideal solutions, far from it.

It's over 40 years since I was first in primary school, but unfortunately there are still thousands of children in schools and other learning environments who are experiencing the same things today as I did back then. Children who don't feel as though they belong because their culture, their lifestyles and their challenges, physically and mentally, are not represented in the mainstream books or other learning media they are presented with. This immediately excludes them and who they are, and deters them from fully expressing themselves. It sends the very strong message that who and what they are is not even acknowledged, let alone celebrated.

Even a negative reference can show that you at least exist, and often if we don't provide positive reflections, children will latch onto the negative ones because that's all they have. For me it was Enid Blyton's Famous Five series, which I loved; even though the Gypsy Traveller reference was very negative, it still mentioned me and my culture. My classmates who also read those books had only those negative references in literature, as did their parents who read to them, and none of the positive ones that I had, perhaps the reason why I didn't get invited round for tea very often.

Popular songs like Cher's 'Gypsies Tramps and Thieves' that we heard people sing along to with gusto, were once again extremely negative, but at least we were in a song.

Conversely, when your culture, your challenges and your lifestyle are positively reflected in the written and spoken word in your learning environment and beyond, you feel included. You feel that you belong in the same space as everyone else, that you are entitled to be here, wherever here is. It doesn't stop there, research also shows that when children and adults from the majority group are exposed to positive texts and images then their sensitivity to minorities is increased, and so is their awareness of their similarities as well as their differences.

Evidence, if any more were needed, for us writers to remember is that we have amazing power to change those negative messages and to give children who feel they don't belong, children who feel like aliens in someone else's world, a positive experience through our stories and books. Stories and books that don't just mention them or include them as an afterthought or as some kind of quota, or the desire to 'do that group now', but stories and books that are about them, fully include them, reflect them and all that they are in as many positive and empowering ways as possible.

That's why I was so pleased to be asked to speak at the IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference recently and meet so many people who are determined to address the balance of the negative. I realised very quickly that on that Saturday at Froebel College, the 'longing for belonging' was being addressed by everyone there, from the organisers to the delegates, the speakers and the publishers.

The five-year-old alien boy says 'thank you and keep up the great work!'

[Richard R. O'Neill is an award-winning storyteller, writer and National Literacy Hero. He is the author of the children's novel *Fabulous Mr Ford and the School for Storytelling*. His latest collection of *Weird and Wondrous Tales* (not a zombie, transforming vehicle, or vampire in sight) will be available in February. See www.richardthet storyteller.weebly.com.]

The Incongruity of the Tibetan Exile Life and why it's Time to Read about It

Aravinda Anantharaman

I have a Tibetan friend. His name is Tenzin Jangchup. When we first met, he had just moved to Bangalore, my hometown, to pursue his education. Jangchup had spent all his life growing up in a Tibetan refugee camp and, like several others like him, left the camp after school to join a college; the camp didn't have one. Jangchup and I met to organise a Tibetan film festival in the city and most of our conversation gravitated to his exile experience. A few days after we had met, he suddenly asked, 'Do you know my name?' I was rather taken aback, but I replied, 'Yes, it's Tenzin Jangchup'. He seemed pleased at my response and went on to explain that ever since he had moved to Bangalore, he found that the locals found it hard to pronounce his second name and stuck to the easier Tenzin. 'But isn't that your name,' I asked, 'your first name?' He replied, 'If you come to my hostel and ask for Tenzin, some 30 people will come out to meet you, both boys and girls.'

We laughed, but I was a bit confused. So was Tenzin a unisex name? Is that what he was saying? I probed some more and he told me that Jangchup was not his surname. His name in whole is Tenzin Jangchup, a name given by the Dalai Lama, who, as is his wont, attaches his own name, Tenzin, to the names he gives children. It's a Tibetan tradition. They don't attach surnames or family names to their own. And when a person has a name like Tenzin Jangchup, his family and friends call him Jangchup. The Indians call him Tenzin.

That was Jangchup's story. Every Tibetan – correction, every Tibetan refugee – I have met has a story to tell. I have listened to these in my home, in my neighbourhood, in their little sweater stalls near the railway station, at the Chinese restaurant in the city centre, over coffee in a café filled with locals, who were not surprised to see a Tibetan here in the plains of south India. I don't know what disturbed me more – that there were so many refugees in my city, or that no one seemed to notice them, or that we couldn't even learn to say their names properly. I have since met many Tibetans who will introduce themselves as Tenzin when they are unsure of the company, revealing their entire names only to people they were getting to know better.

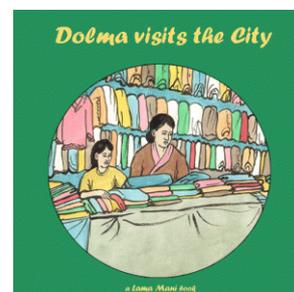
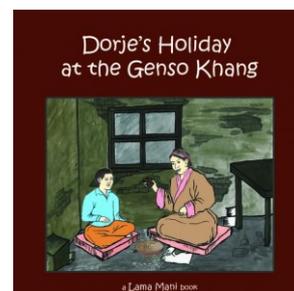
What's their life in exile like? Living in a city that's not quite home, planning a future that's filled with uncertainties, holding on to religion and a leader for stability – that's how I saw it. The exile existence is clearly not easy; it is loaded with questions, dilemmas and a forced sense of acceptance. However, I saw too the moments of enviable solidarity – they are a close-knit community, their relationships are easier and they don't suffer from the formality that Indians do. And most surprisingly to me, they are always smiling.

When I met Jangchup, I was working as a children's librarian and so began to look for books that featured characters like my Tibetan friends. There were none. It was a few years later, but the thought grew, and in 2009 Jangchup and I set up Lama Mani Books, named for the bygone storytellers from the old country. We published two books in a series titled Meyul – a word that describes a place that's not home; *Dorje's Holiday at the Gyenso Khang* (2009) was set in an old-age home in one of the older refugee camps, also in south India. *Dolma Visits the City* (2009) was set amongst the sweater sellers who arrive at the city in the winters. I used as much as I could from the lives that I was trying to describe and wove a story using child protagonists. The illustrator, a young Tibetan named Chime Tashi, was given photographs to use to illustrate the stories. When the books were released, several people liked the fact that they could recognise images, sights and even animals from their everyday life.

Recently, a Tibetan schoolteacher told me that he was showing an American visitor around the school, and she went through their library and noting that there was almost nothing by Tibetan authors and illustrators, and the collection was nearly completely made up of American and British books, she said, 'It's important to have books that are a window to the world. But first, they must be a mirror to the self.' And I cannot think of a better way to describe this need for books on Tibetans, especially for themselves. It stems from the way a child perceives and understands his/her world, first from the self and then progressively beyond it. Here, I would like to draw parallels with my own experience.

People like me – Indians growing up in the 1970s and '80s in urban India – didn't have a great variety to choose from in books. Home-grown Indian children's books were few and largely relegated to a comic series called Amar Chitra Katha, one that most of us remember for its renditions of Indian history and mythology. There were the 'Indian' books like *Kim* (1901) and *The Jungle Book* (1894) by Rudyard Kipling, a writer that we adopted as our own. Mention too must be made of the beautifully illustrated Soviet books that were available at incredulously low prices with stories of the witch Baba Yaga and of Tsarevich Ivan, and so on. But mostly we were raised on a literary diet dominated by Enid Blyton. We devoured her books. We moved between the two worlds easily, slipping off the hot and humid tropics to enter a little English village where tea and scones were had at the bottom of the garden. Most of us tried scones and ginger ale only as adults and I must confess that it tasted better in our imagination. I didn't know what the 'bottom of the garden' was until much later. But it didn't matter as kids; we accepted that there were children with names like Peter, Susan, Jack, Anne and Julian who ate some strange-sounding food and had marvellous and dangerous adventures, and whose parents stayed at the fringes, interfering very little and allowing them to chase thieves across the country. Indeed, I often wondered why their parents never behaved like mine did!

It was not until the late 1990s and, actually, the 2000s that Indian publishing changed, and we began to see the awakening of children's publishing that was rooted in our world. Sari-clad women, auto rickshaws and cows on the streets, vendors dishing out *dosas*, *jalebis* and *laddoos*; all these began to appear in our children's books. I think it excited the parents more than the children, for we were finally going to read books with people who looked like us and with names that tripped off the tongue easily. Finally we had books that were not from 'a long time ago' or 'a land far, far away'.

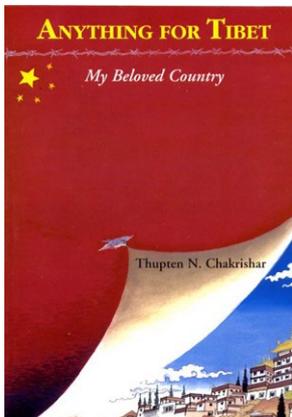


More importantly, it meant that the world we lived in was interesting, and our lives and stories were worth writing about.

Why is it so important to have a representation of ourselves in books? I asked myself that and could not find one single answer. But I do know this – I wish I had had books that were inherently Indian in my childhood; along with all the other kinds, of course. It would have answered several questions I've had in my decision to be a writer and in my choice of English as the language to write in.

In the case of the Tibetan diaspora, I do feel that books about them and their state of being will offer, firstly, an acknowledgement of it, something that's of enormous significance, and, secondly, it is a recording of history in the making. Children's books, because of their singular nature not to overcomplicate a story, to juxtapose text and type with visuals that speak to its readers, no matter how young or old, and the ability to offer a hospitable world for readers of all ages, are a perfect medium. When I see books like Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006) and its capturing of the immigrant experience or even his *The Lost Thing* (2000), which is a misfit's story really, I can see how far we have to go before we can reach that place of sophistication. But there has to be a start.

I am stumped that neither Indians nor Tibetans have recognised the need to write about the lives of the Tibetan exiles in ways that are relevant and offer a view to that world. Different points of view, of an Indian interacting with a Tibetan or vice versa, the dilemmas of a teenage Tibetan when he sees that the Indian teens he meets don't have to constantly worry about their country's independence or even returning to their country, the protest marches that are a regular feature in their world, the way of life, and, yes, even the politics of it, all this has to be talked about. It's time to bring it out in the open and speak up. It's what will offer young Tibetan children the strength to accept that their life is what it is. If not, they will probably spend a childhood assuming that interesting stories are what happen elsewhere. The Western world lays plenty of emphasis on this kind of inclusion. And that's required here today.



However, mention must be made of the challenges in producing such books. Tibetan publishing, a relatively new medium for a culture that has relied on oral tradition, is going through what India did about a couple of decades ago – fables and religious stories are being rehashed in didactic editions that will never find many readers. When I looked for books on the exile life, I found two that I thought deserve mention: Sowmya Rajendran's *The Snow King's Daughter* (Tulika Books), which is a picture book for young readers, and *Anything for Tibet* (Paljor Publishing) by Thupten Chakrishar who wrote and published it while still a high-school student. They speak of the 'Tibetan issue' without hesitation.

Thupten Chakrishar's use of language displays a refreshing lack of fluency and that renders the telling of his story more poignant. The story is set in Tibet and features a protagonist whose patriotism grows during the course of the book. The language strikes the chord. There is a conversation here between two Tibetans – the protagonist Thinley and Tsering, a local. Thinley helps people cross over the mountains into exile and is on his way back from one such trip. Tsering, on the other hand, has not stepped beyond Tibet. They strike a conversation and when Tsering comes to know that Thinley has been to India, he asks:

'Dharamsala ... is it the place where His Holiness lives?'

'Yes, he lives there.'

'Has he grown old?'

'Yes, a little bit.'

'Does he cough while speaking?' asks Tsering.

When Thinley answers in the affirmative, Tsering looks sad. That he asked if the Dalai Lama coughs was, to me, touching. And when Thinley shows Tsering a recent picture of the aging leader, Tsering weeps. The text is not verbose or dramatic and the language

is undistilled because it's not the author's native tongue. In its lack of fluency, there are no clichés. I have heard this in conversations too, this searching for the right words to describe something and without even realising it, the Tibetan will use beautiful imagery or unusual metaphors.

So many stories are waiting to be told and as we wait to read about them, life in the refugee camps continues to change. Every generation in exile has lived a different kind of life. And of this change, there can be no doubt. Exile is still an evolving, changing space for the Tibetan people, and 60 years have passed since several of them chose exile. I am waiting for the day when I will read about my Tibetan friends in children's books, with characters having names like Jangchup and Choewang, whose lives are nothing like mine and yet I'll find myself empathising with the hand they have been dealt. And to be able to buy these books and gift them to my Tibetan friends and have them see that they are not just another boy or girl named Tenzin.

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- [Aravinda Anantharaman has had several jobs in dotcoms (in the 1990s). Her longest and most enjoyable job has been with a children's library called Hippocampus. She is part of a small group called Think Tibet that organises events to introduce people to the Tibetan community. For Think Tibet, she set up Lama Mani Books to publish Tibetan stories for children. She lives in Bangalore, India.]

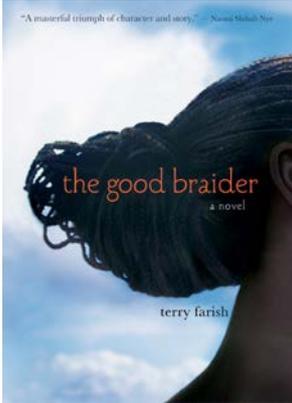
Braids and Belonging: On Writing *The Good Braider*, the Story of a Girl from South Sudan

Terry Farish

One day when I was working in a small seaport city in the state of Maine in the USA, I saw a teenager as tall as an ironwood tree. He was simply walking on the sidewalk, shoulders above passers-by. A child stopped, his mouth open as he lifted his eyes, 'Are you the tallest person in Maine?' he asked.

Maybe he was. It was the year 2000. Soldiers of the government of Sudan were bombing schools, churches and hospitals in the southern part of their country and the US State Department was allowing resettlement of some southern Sudanese families to various US cities, including *this* seaport city where the tall boy made us lift our eyes. The tall boy became my friend, and when I asked him about the foods he ate, he tried to explain, and then said, 'Come, my mother will cook it for you.' He was of a Nilotic tribe called Bari and had lived near Juba. From the day I met his family, I began collecting stories of Sudanese teens and elders in Portland, Maine. Over many years, I wrote the young adult novel *The Good Braider* ([2012] 2014) about a girl who escapes

the war in Sudan and begins the journey of her life to recreate herself and attempts to feel a sense of belonging in an American city.



I met many Sudanese teens over the years from 2000 and on. Let me bring you into one Saturday morning I spent with seven girls in a Kennedy Park apartment, an apartment complex that has traditionally been the home of the city's newest immigrants. The girls, slender and long-legged, lounge on the chairs and sofa. No school, and they have a day off work from the chicken packaging factory where a few of them – and immigrants from all over the world – work. Soon they would cook the day's meal, their job as the daughters of the family. But now they lounge. Two girls braid extensions in the hair of another girl, her legs stretched across the floor. Every girl has extensions in her hair.

From the beginning of my years with the girls of Sudan, it was so much about hair. I saw how the styles were a vital part of their identity and a part of their sense of belonging within their community. A young Sudanese man told me, 'Only if a girl grows up in Africa does she know how to do the braids. If a girl grows up in America she doesn't know how to do the braids. Men like to see a girl with African braids.'

It was art to me as I watched the braiders' fingers fly on the tiny strands of hair.

The Sudanese families welcomed me, a writer who wanted to tell the story of young people from Sudan. Elders struggled with what they saw as disrespect from their children, and when I told them I wanted to try to understand the teenagers' lives, they were eager for me to tell this story. They invited me to be a part of their lives, as they would a family member. Much of what I learned came through observation in family settings they invited me into. I hung out with the girls after school, I met their teachers, I went to dances, I scribbled, I recorded. They got used to me, the writer hanging out with them. They didn't talk about the war, the teenage girls. We did hair. It takes seven or more hours to braid in those tiny extensions. I saw that the hair was parted in very small sections and only a small amount of extension hair is used at one time. A whole culture can be and *is* told in those hours, or sometimes multiple days, that it takes to braid a girl's hair.

I found the amazing history of braiding extensions in *Hair in African Art and Culture* (2000), an exhibition guide created at the Museum for African Art in New York. In the preface to the book, the editors Frank Herreman and Roy Sieber write about Africans bringing hairstyles to the USA: 'One specific technique consisted of weaving or threading materials such as hair additions, colored string, ... beads into a hair style. A popular current technique – using extensions in braiding – would evolve from this.' This was the technique the Sudanese girls were masters of.

With the girls, I was fascinated by their way of making sense of America. 'You Americans,' they teased me, 'you are *always* busy. Why don't you talk to each other?' And they tease each other; they say, 'Oh, who knows when so-and-so will come, she is on Africa time.' With their sense of sisterhood, they are making a corner of America their own. In some ways they are making their own place to belong to, separate from their elders, no matter how deeply loyal they are to family and tribe. I saw how important braids were to a girl's sense of her identity, her value and her sense of belonging to her Sudanese community. I saw the deep respect children have for their elders. They explained to me that a daughter values her bridewealth because her worth to a prospective husband offers economic stability for her family.

I tried to capture some of this sense of belonging to the Sudanese culture and their view of their adopted culture in a chapter called 'White Girl's Braids' about a friend asking the main character Viola to braid a white girl's hair:

How could a white girl know
what the braid means to an African man?
How the braid factors into the girl's value as a bride,
her beauty and quick tongue,
her education.
Her virginity.
All these things add value.
How could this white girl know? (p.147)

One night I made sambusas with a group of girls for a graduation party. We cooked all night long since they couldn't start till midnight when one of the girls, Suzan, got off work at the chicken factory. They taught me how to lightly fold over corners of pastry, tuck in the flaps like an ice cream cone, fill them with ground beef, and then deep fry them.

It was in the early hours of the morning of this all-night cooking that the girls talked about war. They said, 'Here, we don't have to be afraid in the night.' They said, 'You do what your mother says because at home, if you do not, and the bombs come, you will die.' I knew a great deal about the war – from books, and from the boys and men who talked about the war. The girls didn't. But I knew that the teens had lived in Juba, a garrison city where women and children were under the control of the enemy soldiers of the north who occupied Juba. I'd read over and over journalist Scott Peterson's accounts of the war he witnessed. He described Juba and the area around it as a 'tiny, self-contained killing field'. I knew the land around the city was planted not with corn and millet but with 'hundreds of thousands of landmines'. I had read that the rebel army used women and children as human shields (Peterson, 2000). The girls told me none of these things and I didn't ask them. But tonight, images of war slipped in to the conversation while they sang along with Michael Jackson and cooked.

My admiration for the girls I met was profound. At one point I thought that if some terrible misfortune were to come to me, I would want to lay it down at their feet and they would sustain me. They had a toughness I will never have because I have not had to learn it.

Nevertheless, they are in a new land that doesn't necessarily welcome them for what they bring: the skill of shaping pastry like an ice cream cone to make sambusas, braiding extensions with fingers working at the speed of light, and the ability to speak Arabic, several tribal languages, French (since they grew up near the border of Congo), and English learned in mission schools or in the camps.

Another obstacle to their sense of belonging is that some long-time Mainers were and are threatened by the sight of the many tall boys and girls and their elders from South Sudan walking down city streets. There is conflict here and in many other cities around issues of race and immigration. 'Tell them,' one elder told me, 'in the book, tell them we did not want to come here. We came so our children would not die and they could safely go to school.'

Some hopeful reactions came from *The Good Braider* being a community-wide read in the city. Readers could meet a girl through her story, and some said that the story was the first they knew anything about the many new African Americans living in the city's neighbourhoods.

As I've visited schools with *The Good Braider*, I've come to understand there is a universal hunger for belonging from students who have resettled in a country far from home. A Latina student said, 'Like Viola, I am an immigrant, and even after ten years of living in the U.S. I find myself lost between cultures.' Another student from Rwanda in a high-school class for English-language learners read the novel and wrote, 'I am almost American but my memory keeps me an African girl.'

The teens I met had been children in the war. These girls I knew so well are now in their 20s and have children of their own. Suzan married, moved to Baltimore, and has a daughter named Angela whom I see on Facebook with exquisite extensions in her hair. Later I took the train to Baltimore to meet Suzan's daughter to whom I had dedicated *The Good Braider*. Suzan cooked a traditional African dinner that night of aseeda, lentil stew, chicken and chapattis. Angela will grow up with a mother who can still remember the smell of the Nile, a place to which Angela has never been. Angela will go to school in America, wearing American fashions and speaking American slang. She may reject the Juba Arabic her mother speaks with the other South Sudanese moms. She will know things about America that the mothers who came from the war may never understand.

My girls in *The Good Braider* – Viola, Poni and Jackie – are strong young women like the teens I met. I expect Viola will have earned a college degree, and Poni will have returned to Juba, with her US citizenship in place, to continue the fight for peace in newly independent South Sudan.

Their daughters will grow up with English as their first language and it is likely they will earn college degrees. They will have a deeper sense of belonging in the USA. But they will also grow up feeling the strength of their mothers' fingers braiding extensions in their hair. They'll learn this African art, and bring the skill into their sense of belonging in the cultural mosaic that is the USA and much of the world.

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[Terry Farish's *The Good Braider* is written in free verse. Her forthcoming novel is titled *Either the Beginning or the End of the World* (Carolrhoda Lab, 2015.) She had the privilege of studying with Jan Mark when Jan Mark was in residence at Oxford Polytechnic in the 1980s.]

The Stigma and Isolation of Bereavement in Children's Literature

Kate Mitchell

Introduction

At the recent IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference on the theme of 'Belonging...' there was much discussion of barriers to children's sense of belonging, and how this can be addressed in literature. I work for the charity Cruse Bereavement Care, and I was struck by how many similarities there are between the challenges faced by children who have experienced bereavement and those whose sense of 'not belonging' resulted from some other factor such as race, disability, or refugee status. Bereavement can happen to any child, regardless of how well integrated they were before the death of their friend or relative. And once it happens, as well as the immediate emotional impact, bereavement can result in children experiencing stigmatisation, bullying and feelings of isolation.

Books and stories have the potential to help readers examine and understand difficult and complicated feelings. Recent theories of bereavement focus on how we make meaning out of our experiences, and books can be a part of this, helping to reduce the isolation of those who need it most – the children and young people who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Isolation, stigma and bullying

At Cruse we often hear how bereaved people can feel rejected and stigmatised by others at a time when they are most in need of support, and bereaved children and young people are no exception. As 14-year-old Jane, who was ten when she lost her grandmother explains:

At the funeral people kept telling me it was going to be okay and that they knew how I felt. But NO! There was not one person who knew how I felt, except me. I felt isolated ... I lay in my room unable to sleep, eat or speak. (Cruse, 2014: 9)

Ervin Goffman has defined a stigmatised person as someone who:

possesses an attribute that makes him different from others. ... He is thus reduced in our minds to a tainted, discounted one ... sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. (1963: 3)

The stigma is often experienced as if the person has an infectious illness, and bereaved people often report that friends and colleagues will cross the road to avoid talking to them. In a literature survey Jane Ribbens McCarthy found that isolation and loneliness are also common themes reported by young people and that 'a sense of difference and a long-term sense of loneliness may be frequent experiences' (2007: 7).

Stigma can be felt inside (as a difference from others), or imposed externally. Bereaved children's friendships may suffer because their peers do not know how to respond or because the child voluntarily isolates themselves. Bereaved children are more likely to have moved schools or to have been excluded, and are less likely to take part in clubs and activities outside school (Fauth, Thompson and Penny, 2009).

School is often a stressful place for bereaved children, and teachers are often reported as a problem, rather than as a source of support (Chowns, 2013). Many other children experience their stigma in the form of bullying by peers. An analysis of bereaved children's calls to Childline found that bullying was a particular issue (Cross, as reported in Ribbens McCarthy, 2007).

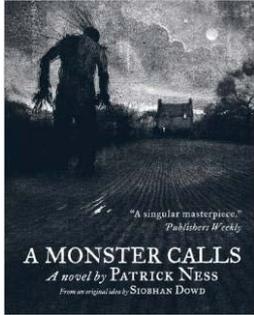
A recent analysis of a nationally representative sample of children and young people found that around one in ten children (9.5%) were reported to have experienced either the death of a parent/sibling or a friend or both (Fauth, Thompson and Penny, 2009). This equates to several children in every classroom, so, despite the feelings of separateness many bereaved children may experience, in reality it is a far from uncommon issue.

Terminal illness and bereavement in books for young people

Children's literature is no stranger to death and bereavement, and examples range from those where the death of parents is largely a plot point to in-depth examinations of grief. The two novels I discuss below cover, among other things, the effects of stigma, isolation and bereavement on their young protagonists as part of their focus, and therefore provide points of identification for readers also grappling with these issues.

A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness (2011) was the result of an idea of Siobhan Dowd, who was not able to write the book herself due to her own early death from cancer. In the novel, 13-year-old Conor is struggling with his mother's terminal illness. The monster of the title visits Conor by night, and uses stories to help him confront the reality of his emotional experiences. Before the monster first visits, Conor has become estranged

from one of his closest friends and from his peers. Everyone at school knows about Conor's situation, and Conor blames his friend Lily for passing round the news.



Before the day was half through, it was like a circle had opened around him, a dead area with Conor at the centre, surrounded by landmines that everyone was afraid to walk through. ... It was like he'd suddenly turned invisible. ... the other kids still treated him like he was the one who was ill. (pp.78–79)

Passages such as this vividly portray the feelings of isolation and stigma common to those who have been or are about to be bereaved.

Conor also suffers a recurring nightmare where he lets his mother fall from a cliff, about which he is deeply ashamed. The nightmares mark the beginning of his targeting by school bully, Harry:

When Conor started having that nightmare, that's when Harry noticed him, like a secret mark had been placed on him that only Harry could see. (p.29)

Whilst the less sophisticated bullies taunt Conor for 'his baldy mother', Harry is shown as finding a deeper and more painful truth with which to torment him.

Harry raised a fist and pulled it back as if to swing it at Conor's face.

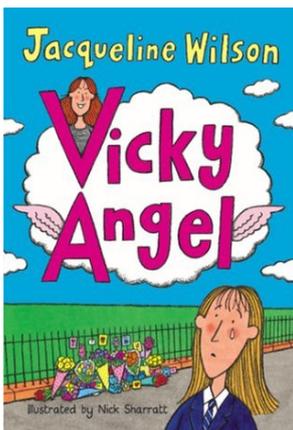
Conor still didn't flinch. He didn't even move. He just stared into Harry's eyes, waiting for the punch to fall.

But it didn't.

Harry lowered his fist, dropping it slowly down by his side, still staring at Conor. 'Yes,' he finally said, quietly, as if he'd worked something out. 'That's what I thought'.

(p.81)

There are other sections where Conor's rage and anger appear to be calls for punishment, and the bullying by Harry is shown at least in part as a consequence of Conor's own feelings of guilt, and not just his situation. It is the role of the monster to force Conor to acknowledge his contradictory feelings, to learn that his actions are more important than his hidden emotions and, in the last scene, to let his mother go.



Conor is in the stage of pre-bereavement, and the death of his mother occurs at or just after the end of the book. In *Vicky Angel* by Jacqueline Wilson (2000) we follow Jade, also aged around 13, through the death and aftermath of her best friend Vicky. Vicky appears to Jade as a ghost or angel, and the novel charts Jade's battles with, and eventual separation from, her friend.

The other children in Jade's school are on the whole supportive, but Jade feels increasingly isolated from others:

Everyone's kind to me at school but I can't always react the right way. I creep around in this fog while they rush around in the sunshine. (p.74)

As time goes on, the ghost of Vicky becomes increasingly aggressive, refusing to tolerate Jade's budding friendships with other girls and with supportive 'Fatboy' Sam. To some extent, ghost Vicky's behaviour is shown as in keeping with her character while she was alive, with a dominant personality and a tendency to get her own way. But with the help of a bereavement counsellor Jade begins to realise that ghost Vicky has changed from the real girl:

But when I look at the photo of Vicky and then up at the ghost girl I see she isn't exactly the same. The Vicky in the photo is somehow more ordinary. She's very pretty, she looks very cheeky, she's the girl you'd pick out first in a crowd – but she's still an ordinary schoolgirl. Ghost Vicky is white and weird and wild. (p.129)

Jaqueline Wilson states in her prologue that readers will have to make up their own minds about whether or not Vicky is a ghost. However it's clear that it is partly Jade's own feelings of guilt that are preventing her from overcoming her feelings of isolation and making friends with those reaching out to her, and that ghost Vicky is a manifestation of this. As in *A Monster Calls*, *Vicky Angel* ends with a scene of letting go. At the inquest Jade is forced to relive Vicky's last moments and confront the fact that she stood up to her during an argument in the last minutes before her death. In a repeat of the accident, the ghost Vicky prevents Jade from running into the path of a car, and by offering forgiveness is 'allowed' to leave, in the last line of the book:

We have one last long hug and then, as Mum and Dad catch up, Vicky leaps into the air. She flaps wings as white as swansdown, waves one last time, and flies away.
(p.156)

In both books, acceptance and letting go can be seen as pre-requisites of re-establishing a connection with others and beginning the process of recovery. The demands of narrative structure require that characters go through a journey, and narratives of bereavement can often show grief as a trajectory or series of stages from distress to recovery, with 'letting go' as a necessity of successful grieving. These constructions of grieving are now generally considered out of date and more recent theories emphasise the importance of maintaining continuing bonds with those who have died (Hall, 2014). *Vicky Angel* ends before we can see if Jade successfully renegotiates a relationship with Vicky once the ghost has gone from her life, but in *A Monster Calls*, there is an acknowledgement that the main hope for Conor's troubled relationship with his grandmother, who he will have to live with, is their shared connection with mother and daughter respectively.

Reading, identification and bibliotherapy

Books are in many ways uniquely placed as a way to portray and examine bereavement. First-person narratives can provide access to the thoughts and emotions of characters and can be examined (or skipped over) and revisited at the reader's own pace. Books such as *A Monster Calls* and *Vicky Angel* can also use supernatural or mythical elements to personify and further examine the turmoil the characters are experiencing.

At the conference many speakers emphasised the importance for young people of being able to find themselves realistically represented in the books they read. It is common for those who have been bereaved to feel as if they are going mad. For grieving readers, finding books that show emotions such as anger and guilt, and experiences such as bullying, feeling the presence of or 'seeing' the person who has died (also common) may help reduce their feelings of isolation.

Non-bereaved readers may also benefit – they may identify with the emotions and isolation experienced in bereavement, which can also come about as a result of other traumas, or simply as an aspect of a 'normal' adolescence. It is also possible that books that show some of the effects of bereavement may help to reduce the stigmatisation and isolation of bereaved children by helping non-bereaved readers empathise with and support their peers.

Taking the potential uses of books about death and grief a step further, Eileen Jones has explored the use of children's literature as 'bibliotherapy'. Jones describes how bibliotherapy can be used as an 'art' where:

a therapist offers or makes available carefully selected published narratives. The child, through reading, has the freedom to hold an internal dialogue in accordance with his unique life experience, initiated by the author's narrative. As in any personal reading the child has the opportunity to 'discuss' his problems internally, and may, as a result, wish to engage in dialogue with the therapist. (2001: 17–18).

Jones recounts several case studies where she has used literature to open up discussion with troubled bereaved children. Bereaved children often exhibit some of the behaviours we find in the fictional examples of Conor and Jade, such as withdrawal, loss of appetite, rudeness, anger and physical violence (p.10). On being given a book to read by Jones (*The Charlie Barber Treatment* by Carole Lloyd, 1987), one boy asked to talk about it in a session, reporting:

I've bought a copy of the book because I wanted to mark some of the happenings which were like me. I've read those over and over again ... somehow I feel released, from what I don't know, but I do. (p.11)

Books can act as a catalyst for discussion during counselling as it can sometimes be easier to talk about the experiences of a fictional character, and this can provide a way into the child's own experiences. Jones also highlights the potential of books to let the child 'become his own therapist, reading and rereading a book, perhaps discovering new levels of meaning, interpretation, understanding and relevance to his own situation' (p.125). However, she also advises that choice of book and knowledge of the child in question can be crucial, and this is where a trained bibliotherapist, knowledgeable teacher or children's librarian can be helpful in advising and recommending books to bereaved young readers.

Conclusion

Narratives of bereavement have the potential to reduce feelings of stigma and isolation in bereavement in a number of ways: by providing peers with insight into what bereaved children are going through; by providing validation and confirmation to those experiencing bereavement that they are not alone in their feelings; and by providing a possible way in for teachers, bereavement supporters and therapists to help the most troubled children open up about their own experiences. We need to be cautious of uncritically endorsing simplistic narratives of grief, recovery and letting go, and those recommending books to young people should avoid implying that the experiences of fictional characters will necessarily be the same for everyone. However, recent theories also emphasise that reconstruction of meaning is a critical issue in grief:

Life's most grievous losses disconnect us from our sense of who we are and can set in train an effortful process of not only re-learning ourselves but also the world. For many the desire to 'make sense' and 'find meaning' in the wake of loss is central. (Hall, 2014: 7)

Stories, above all, are an exercise in making meaning, and therefore have the potential to help those children and young people who have faced unbearably difficult situations in their own lives, and reduce their feelings of isolation and stigma.

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Winston's Wish Reading List. [www.winstonswish.org.uk/wp-](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Suggested_reading_list_Sept13.pdf)

[content/uploads/2013/10/Suggested_reading_list_Sept13.pdf](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Suggested_reading_list_Sept13.pdf).

[Kate Mitchell is Managing Editor of the *Bereavement Care Journal*.]

Stories for Overcoming Barriers: Commissioned by Amnesty International

Janice Bland

This article introduces *FREE? Stories Celebrating Human Rights* (published by Walker Books, 2009), an anthology of 14 short stories commissioned by Amnesty International to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The stories by well-established children's authors of world literature in English offer compelling, often humorous, but also disturbing, stories, designed for 10–15 year olds. I believe that reading narrative can be understood as training for understanding connections and overcoming barriers, as the reader is always searching for patterns: 'a big part of the pleasure of reading is recognizing, interpreting, and then connecting the dots so the pattern emerges' (Cron, 2012: 194). Thus meaningful narrative trains the reader to connect and transfer insights, to mentally represent alternative visions for the future, to accumulate world knowledge and to rehearse a change of perspective – and all this in addition to improving language skills.

Selby and Pike (2000) have developed a four-dimensional model to encompass various interlocking elements of global education as critical learning in the twenty-first century. Selby and Pike's first dimension, the '*spatial dimension*', refers to the interdependence of the local and global, and how 'personal well-being is entwined with the economic and political decision-making of governments around the world' (p.141). This dimension critiques the compartmentalisation of subjects in education as antithetical to the development of multiple perspectives and alternative solutions. Selby and Pike's '*issues dimension*' highlights the interconnectedness and related effects of 'the environment, gender and race equity, health, peace and conflict resolution, rights and responsibilities' (p.141). Further, the 'issues dimension' points to diverse cultural, social and ideological perspectives – encounters with different vantage points could be a



catalyst for 'ultimately reframing personal worldviews' (p.142). The '*temporal dimension*' highlights the deep embeddedness of phases of time within each other, for the integration of past, present and future is essential for 'a profound understanding of any curricular topic' (p.142). Finally, the '*inner dimension*' correlates with intercultural learning. With regard to the 'inner dimension', Selby and Pike claim that global education 'is a voyage along two complementary learning pathways. While the journey outwards leads learners to discover and understand the world in which they live, the journey inwards heightens their understanding of themselves and of their potential' (pp.142–43).

Taken together Selby and Pike's four dimensions argue for defeating barriers:

- overcoming the partitioning of education
- understanding the interconnectedness of global issues
- realising the integration of past, present and future
- grasping the interdependence of personal development and planetary awareness.

Narratives chosen for engaged reading involving global issues are often life stories describing dramatic and formative events that compel emotional resonances. Young adult readers can connect to such immersive life stories, usually with a young hero or heroine as focaliser, as they have their own life stories full of the drama of belonging, which, particularly in the multicultural classrooms of today, may be equally of a life-changing nature. These are, however, all too often ignored in education:

Both culturally and technologically, education seems to be becoming distanced from people's daily lives. The life stories reveal the wealth of experience to be explored, which could inform our teaching. The world is in the classroom. It can only be translated into new cultural webs if we enter into dialogues and explore people's lived experience. (Kearney, 2003: 8)

While the stories and poems in *FREE?* discuss issues such as sweatshop labour, as in Theresa Breslin's 'School Slave' and Eoin Colfer's 'Christopher', they simultaneously illustrate that child and slave labour are not an affliction of developing countries only – the above-mentioned stories are both set in the UK. Critical young adult literature suits the rebellious adolescent reader, whose inner turmoil finds a painful parallel in contemporary society's anxieties and injustice, for 'Young Adult literature can help teenagers to think about, and hopefully to transcend, the rigid and dysfunctional structures of popular culture, stereotyping, oppression, and injustice' (Hilton and Nikolajeva, 2012: 15). Life stories and epiphanies are often enthralling because they can unveil particular and unfamiliar cultural contexts, yet producing resonances that are universal. The variety of individual experience in any one heterogeneous classroom can lead through dialogic analysis of the stories to an awareness of the dynamic interconnection between particular fates and universal experience:

[S]chools could draw upon the multifarious cultures of the 30 or so individuals within the class, thereby providing children with the opportunity to compare the beliefs, conventions and ways of doing things within their own home and with those of their peers. (Driscoll, Earl and Cable, 2013: 157)

Raising critical cultural awareness of one's own and other cultures can be achieved with children's literature, which is not afraid to build a fictional world as a parable to elucidate a realistic setting. There are several examples from *FREE?* when the narrative shows how the sense of nation diverges within one and the same national culture. Patrick McCormick's symbolic story 'If Only Papa Hadn't Danced' is set in Zimbabwe during the fiercely contested elections of 2008; in this case the specific political background is referred to only in an Author's Note. Rita Williams-Garcia's 'After the Hurricane' reveals in a narrative poem the plight of the citizens of New Orleans who were the worst hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. While multiple failures of the city's

floodwalls caused many fatalities, the responses from local, state and federal governments were considered by many to be inadequate and even racist. Malorie Blackman's 'Searching for a Two-way Street', a narrative poem about a future society that operates a total one-way surveillance of its citizens, strikes a chord with the Facebook, Twitter and mobile-phone generation – one that is well aware of the power of social networking and its potential for control, manipulation and intimidation.

An elevated degree of cultural authenticity can be relied upon in a collection of stories commissioned by Amnesty International. This is important, as the story world becomes real by aesthetic illusion, and therefore must be as thoroughly researched as non-fiction text. Postcolonial literature is often in part autobiographical, or in some other way based on personal experience, and is therefore authentic in the culture-embedded setting. In addition, children's literature authentically reaches out to the pre-adult reader so that the reading experience is authentic. Adolescent readers, as relatively powerless themselves, are likely to empathise with the predicament of non-hegemonic groups and individuals in their struggle against oppression. Fairness and justice are recurring themes in *FREE?* – from a postcolonial perspective in Sarah Mussi's 'Scout's Honour', from a perspective on prejudice and racism in David Almond's 'Klaus Vogel and the Bad Lads' and Rita Williams-Garcia's 'After the Hurricane', on religion in Ibtisam Barakat's 'Uncle Meena' and Michael Morpurgo's 'No Trumpets Needed', on gender in Jamila Gavin's 'Wherever I Lay Down My Head' and on class in Margaret Mahy's 'Setting Words Free'.

As a collection of short stories, *FREE?* is far from Anglocentric or Eurocentric, nor does it fall into the trap of exoticism or orientalism. The UK authors write about human-rights transgressions that take place in or connected to the UK, and the American authors write about human-rights transgressions that take place in the USA. Other nations and continents are also represented by their major children's writers: Meja Mwangi from Kenya, Ibtisam Barakat from Palestine, Jamila Gavin from India, Ursula Dubosarsky from Australia, Eoin Colfer and Roddy Doyle from Ireland, Margaret Mahy from New Zealand and Rita Williams-Garcia from Jamaica. The stories vary considerably as to their complexity, from a linguistically simple and straightforward parable (Meja Mwangi's 'Jojo Learns to Dance') to intriguing and challenging stories (such as Sarah Mussi's 'Scout's Honour' and Rita Williams-Garcia's 'After the Hurricane'), all of which offer a high level of intertextuality and dark irony. After each of the 14 narratives in *FREE?*, one of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is quoted. Following Roddy Doyle's 'Prince Francis', for example, there is a summary of Article 15: 'We all have the right to belong to a country'. Eoin Colfer's 'Christopher' is followed by a summary of Article 24: 'We all have the right to rest from work and relax' and Michael Morpurgo's 'No Trumpets Needed' ends with Article 28: 'We have a right to peace and order so that we can all enjoy rights and freedoms in our own country and all over the world'. There is an overview of all 30 articles at the end of the book in a somewhat simplified text. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has achieved the Guinness World Record as most translated document, into 300 languages and dialects, suggesting a wide-reaching commitment to human rights: 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the Most Universal Document in the World' (www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/WorldRecord.aspx).

Although I can spotlight only a few of the stories in *FREE?*, I hope nonetheless to offer a glimpse of the potential the authentic, intense short-story form affords. I have omitted here some amazing stories, including two of my favourites: David Almond's 'Klaus Vogel and the Bad Lads' and Sarah Mussi's 'Scout's Honour', for I refer to them in detail elsewhere (Bland, 2013). I will begin with two stories set against the familiar background of school. In these stories, Theresa Breslin's 'School Slave' and Margaret Mahy's 'Setting Words Free', the protagonists are willing and able to investigate a particular issue thoroughly, against the advice of their parents, that concerns children outside their normal environment.

Theresa Breslin's 'School Slave': The Right to an Education

Ryan, the young protagonist of 'School Slave', is not a model secondary-school pupil: 'Numbers did his head in; words made his eyes ache' (p.29). Ryan is portrayed as absorbed in and connected to nature, and deeply resentful of his time in school: 'In school. Every day. A slave, that's what he was' (p.30). The tale turns swiftly into a gripping detective story when Ryan discovers a message floating on the canal on his way to school: HELP. Initially he believes it is a joke, but on his way home after school he studies the message again, and realises the letters have been drawn with mud. Using his understanding of the local landscape, and despite his mother's suspicions and accusations when he texts her that he will be late home from school, Ryan, like a sleuth, is able to follow the clues and figure out the origin of the message. He investigates the circumstances and discovers children who are being kept captive in a boathouse, to be exploited as slave workers. When their brutal captor suddenly arrives at the canal, he pluckily invents a story to delay the man long enough for the police reach the scene. Ryan and his mother can hardly believe how tiny some of the children are:

'It can be big business,' the child protection officer replied. 'Organized criminals buy children in Third World countries, promising their parents that they'll get an education and employment. Some are trafficked into the UK and kept well hidden in out-of-the-way places so no one will find them. But because of Ryan's actions, at least these lucky few might be able to lead a normal life and be educated.' (pp.42–43).

Following 'School Slave', two Human Rights articles are quoted: 'Nobody has any right to make us a slave. We cannot make anyone else our slave' and 'We all have the right to an education'. Forced labour and lack of educational opportunities are still problems of global proportions. Forced labour is estimated to be currently the reality of 21 million people worldwide:

Victims of forced labour are frequently from minority or marginalised groups who face institutionalised discrimination and live on the margins of society where they are vulnerable to slavery practices.

www.antislavery.org/english/slavery_today/forced_labour/default.aspx

In the case of Ryan, he comes to understand and appreciate the privilege of education as well as the vicious nature of real slavery; while his mother and teachers learn to respect the value of his environmental awareness and personal development outside school.

Margaret Mahy's 'Setting Words Free': The Right to Make One's Own Friends

With the current concerns over societies fractured by cultural diversity and class conflict, culturally constructed values, meanings and subjectivities are central concerns when analysing texts. 'Setting Words Free' is a teenage romance fable critiquing social selection in schools. The matter of the story is easily recognisable in all educational contexts where social selection in education is still high. The protagonist, Daniel, meets a girl from another school, Tessie. They are drawn to each other through their love of reading and language games, which sets them apart from their school friends. Tessie describes herself as a 'word boss', but goes to the run-down Marley Street College. Daniel attends a fee-paying boys' school, St Catherine's, and is used to hearing the Marley Street taunt: 'St Cat's! St Cat's! They're a bunch of stuck-up brats!' (p.151).

Daniel and Tessie have a mutual interest in books, and there are references to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass*, *Oliver Twist* and the Harry Potter books. Their love of reading forms a natural bridge, yet it is not easy for them to meet as friends: 'Daniel knew that his father had once lived in the Marley Street part of

town, and had worked hard to leave it It was almost as if he had crossed over into a different country' (p.150). The story describes the subtle barriers that are built up against cross-cultural friendships – in this case social class is the construct that confines Daniel and Tessie to, as the text describes it, their different countries, each in their own land. Their homes are separated by a park, which Daniel crosses to meet Tessie:

As he approached that faraway edge, the park seemed to deteriorate around him. The grass dried up as if it had not been watered in the same careful way that *his* end of the park had been. There was a children's playground off to the left, but the seesaw was snapped in half and one of the swings hung crookedly. There was something desolate about that dangling swing, quivering just a little in the slight wind, its broken chain snaking in the muddy puddle under the seat. (pp.154–55)

Daniel's father objects to their growing friendship, warning his son to stay away from that part of town. Neither will the father welcome Tessie to their house: 'Next thing we know, we'd have the walls of our house sprayed with filthy words and thugs thumping all over our garden' (p.160). But Daniel and Tessie go on meeting in a half-secret way, and Daniel 'felt that he and Tessie were playing a secret language game ... building a bridge that crossed the grassy sea, tying one side of the park to the other' (p.162). Such bridges are possibly as difficult to build today as they have ever been; however, the tale ends – in the tradition of most children's literature – optimistically and encouragingly. Yet Tessie's words, that might serve as a motto for this collection of stories, take on an urgent relevance following the 7 January 2015 terrorist attack on the French satirical news magazine *Charlie Hebdo*:

'Me, I like to set words flying out into the open air like paper aeroplanes.' She laughed, waving her arms above her head as if she were indeed turning words loose. 'It's a sort of law that words should be free,' she said, still laughing, but more to herself. (p.161)

Eoin Colfer's 'Christopher': Literature and Art Can Challenge Social Power Relations

An examination of the hidden present can shed light on who is included and who is excluded in the here and now. Colfer's 'Christopher' is a very amusing, but also tragic story. The focus is sweatshop labour: 'On this Sunday Marco was stitching gold wings onto the pockets of fake Nike shorts' (p.193). The characters are all in one way or another humorous, including the bullying foreman: 'Bluto growled at him. "What you smiling at, kid? You don't get no extra time for smiling. Stitch them wings speedy, the way I like it"' (p.194). However, the issue is serious for the focaliser Marco: 'Everyone pulled their weight in Marco's family; even the twins helped to make the foil roses that his mother sold at the city's traffic lights' (p.194). While Marco adores the jokes that his friend Christopher continuously makes, conflict arises with the foreman, and Marco is terrified that the brave and vivacious Kenyan boy will be fired for his clowning antics. It would be a pity to disclose the entire story here, as nothing can match Eoin Colfer's masterful storytelling. It must, however, be revealed that the final sentence of the story is a classic example of schema refreshment (a new take on a familiar issue) through literature, and one that on the first reading can easily be missed:

Marco felt sick to his stomach and wished that he could go home. But he knew he must return to the factory. Before he went back inside, he allowed himself one last longing look at the lights and life of the city beyond. His mother was out there somewhere, selling foil roses at the traffic lights of east London. (p.202)

A discussion of the work of the British street artist Banksy, whose satirical graffiti subversively comments on issues of social justice, could accompany a reading of 'Christopher'. Banksy is an anonymous urban artist with an international reputation. His mural 'Slave Labour', depicted in Figure 1, appeared on the wall of a north London Poundland store in May 2012, just before the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee

celebrations. Poundland is a chain of discount stores that sells every item for only £1. The mural shows a small boy kneeling at a sewing machine, stitching the union jack flags for street festivities such as the Jubilee.



Figure 1. 'Slave Labour'. A work by street artist Banksy.

All the stories in this collection are approachable, and many are both compelling and fun, while still being informative enough to spur discussions, and hopefully promote a willingness to investigate particular issues further. Affording students the opportunity to develop a sense of global citizenship may encourage much-needed optimism in a problematic world, helping students develop an awareness of their responsibility as global citizens and a sense of their power as critical consumers.

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[Janice Bland is a Teacher Educator of primary and secondary English Language Teaching, with a specialism in children's and young adult literature. She is the author of *Children's Literature and Learner Empowerment*, Bloomsbury Academic (2013). She is also joint editor of the peer-reviewed, open-access CLELE journal *Children's Literature in English Language Education* <http://clelejournal.org>.]

Raising Voices: The Seven Stories and Frances Lincoln Diverse Voices Promotion

Jake Hope

The year 2014 saw Seven Stories: the National Centre for the Children's Book and Frances Lincoln publishing announce a promotion of 50 recommended diverse children's books. This article will highlight how the promotion came to be, the process via which selection was made, ongoing challenges that were raised as part of this and applied use for the initiative.

What is cultural diversity? Through the course of the Diverse Voices competition and the more recent promotion, it is clear that diversity means vastly different things to different people. One of the privileges of being involved with this project has been being a part of the discussion and debate around what cultural diversity means. Trevor Phillips, former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and a judge on the initial Diverse Voices award, described how he felt there were different types of diverse book – those which offer 'windows into worlds', shining a light onto different cultures and communities, and those which are diverse in terms of the range of different cultures and communities that are reflected within them.

The origins of the Diverse Voices promotion arose from the Diversity Matters conference held in 2006, which appraised the contemporary publishing landscape, its reflection of diversity and the opportunities that existed to grow markets through this. Frances Lincoln publishers were keen to design and develop an award that promoted new writing for children that was culturally diverse either in the stories that were told or through the background of the authors. The first Frances Lincoln Diverse Voices Children's Book award was made in 2009. The project was developed in partnership with Seven Stories and was first awarded to Australian author Cristy Burne for the action-packed novel *Takeshita Demons* (2010). The book was suffused with traditional legend and lore from Japanese culture and went on to be selected for Booktrust's gifting initiative 'Booked Up', as well as being featured on the BBC's flagship children's programme *Blue Peter* – a powerful indicator of the appetite and interest that exists for quality writing that reflects cultural diversity.



Following Burne's inaugural win, in subsequent years the competition was awarded to Tom Avery for *Too Much Trouble*, Helen Limon for *Om Shanti Babe* (2012) and finally to Tariq Mehmood for *You're Not Proper* (2013). As the award progressed, links grew with community groups and writing organisations such as Commonword in Manchester, enabling greater support, development and mentoring for new writers.

Following Frances Lincoln's acquisition by the Aurum group, changes in publishing priorities meant that the award in its then iteration was no longer viable. The landscape for culturally diverse writers had also changed with the emergence of new

opportunities through an association between Commonword and Puffin books. Discussions thus ensued between Seven Stories and Frances Lincoln to arrange a promotion and programming for a season that explored diversity in children's books and publishing. This felt an exciting opportunity to engage with debate and thinking around globalisation, nationhood, inclusion, exclusion and issues around representation.

With the promotion agreed, criteria were established. Books for consideration as part of the promotion needed to explore cultural diversity in terms of their story or the ethnic and cultural origins of its author and/or illustrator and have been published or widely distributed in the UK from 1950 until the present day, but authors and illustrators did not need to be UK nationals or residents.

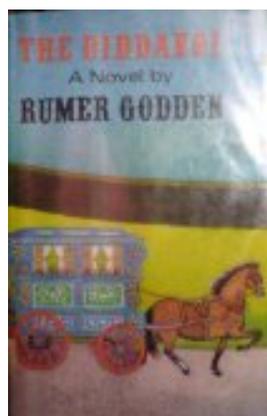
A panel of cross-sectoral experts was drawn together with reviewers, librarians and book-agency representatives. Titles were split across four different age categories – Early Years (0+), Young Readers (5+), Older Readers (8+) and Teenage Readers (13+). A longlist of titles was drawn together from nominations submitted by publishers, titles recommended by a panel of experts and through research from bibliographic resources.

Nominated books were then whittled down to a shortlist comprising nearly 200 titles. Secondary criteria were implemented as part of this process. These included:

- the spread of titles across the years from 1950
- consideration of the range of communities and cultures reflected by the texts
- consideration around education and/or social-value judgements that lent texts sustained longevity
- critical and popular reactions at and since the time of publication
- ability level of texts (we were keen to achieve a balance and thereby suit different needs)
- overall significance within the fields of children's publishing or children's literature
- the period of time in print and its availability in print so as to be accessible to libraries, schools and related venues
- potential the titles held to generate discussion.

A full day discussing the titles and working out the fit for each category was held. A number of findings arose from this.

The panel felt several books that were agreed to be seminal in terms of the heritage of cultural diversity in children's books were not wholly reflective of modern attitudes. These included Rumer Godden's *The Diddakoi* (1972) and Lucy M. Boston's *The Chimneys of Green Knowe* (1964). Whilst these were not selected for the main list, it was felt that their contributions had been significant and that there should be honourable mentions for titles that had helped to leverage focus or change.



Included within the honourable mentions were titles that, whilst being admirable and well worthy of contention, were no longer in print. These included books such as Floella Benjamin's *Coming to England* (1995) and Robert Westall's *Gulf* (1992).



Although the initial selections had included some factual titles, these were largely curriculum focused and tended only to feature imagery of diverse children. There was a general lack of factual titles that explored diversity.

Some communities were well represented, but it was felt there were others that were featured far less in children's books. Indian communities were felt to be particularly under-represented in the picture-book category.

Educational resources were prepared alongside the list of recommended titles, and were based around trialling of the list that was undertaken by New Writing North, the Reader Organisation and the Discover Children's Story Centre. These findings helped to inform a learning package structured around the concept of 'home' – a key theme in children's literature and also a universal one. There are two resource packs available from Seven Stories, one that uses the core list, and one that uses an extended list available with a collection of books for more in-depth exploration by schools.

Launched at *The Guardian* offices, the list brought together publishers, illustrators, key influencers across the world of children's books and was an upbeat, lively affair that valuably showed that across the sector there was an appetite for supporting culturally diverse books for children.

Following the media launch in London, an advocacy session was held at the Youth Libraries Group annual conference, encouraging delegates to explore the diverse make-ups of the communities that they serve and to actively engage with the titles that formed the list, considering how these might be used in their sessions.

As with any list of recommendations, the titles form a starting point and a springboard from which further discussion and exploration can take place. It has been heartening to see the level of exposure, interest and engagement with the list.

On the whole the list's reception has been incredibly positive, although there were some queries about representation of Native American culture within some of the books. This highlights how cultural representation is not static, but shifts and changes, emphasising the need for continued focus.

The disappointing element with the promotion was the relatively small pool of titles published since 1950 from which to select; a sign of how far there is to travel. Here's hoping that 60 years from now, books for whatever age, will automatically be populated with all manner of peoples from different places and backgrounds, and that this will be embedded.

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Websites

For further information and resources on Diverse Voices, see www.sevenstories.org.uk/learning/projects-and-partnerships/diverse-voices-2014

The list of titles is at www.sevenstories.org.uk/news/latestnews/diverse-voice-top-50.

The resource packs can be obtained from www.sevenstories.org.uk/learning/books-and-resources/diverse-voices-free-resources

[Jake Hope has been reading development manager for Lancashire, co-ordinated the Lancashire Book of the Year award and championed reading, especially reading for pleasure through the Lancashire Reading Trail. He regularly reviews and commentates on children's books and has lectured on psychoanalytical approaches to children's literature. He has been on the judging panel of numerous book awards, including the prestigious CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway medals and the international Bologna Ragazzi award. He is a committed supporter of diversity in children's books and has judged the Diverse Voices award since its inception.]

Belonging Is...: 'May Everyone Really Mean Everyone'

Julia Eccleshare

The 2014 IBBY International Congress in Mexico City was founded on a beguiling and inspiring premise. 'May everyone really mean everyone' should be a required thought for everyone working in children's books, whether they are writers, illustrators, publishers, or those who play the also important roles of getting the books into the hands of young readers; and in many ways and many places, it has been. And yet everyone knows that even more can be done.

With such a theme, the 34th IBBY International Congress was bound to be rich in insights into the practice and theory of what that ambition means across the world. What was actually delivered went far beyond even that strong promise, as the international children's book community brought to the table so many different examples of inclusivity and how it is translated into reality for both the creators and readers of children's literature.

For me, the debate around inclusivity in terms of a wide range of the obvious points of character representations and social situations has been a key part of my working life. The call for change came loudly in the 1970s and it has continued to a greater or lesser degree in the subsequent decades. And yet, despite all those good intentions, there is still a long way to go. With examples from across the world, the congress showed worldwide progress – as well as a worldwide need to keep doing more to represent all children in books and to bring all children to reading.

With so many decades spent on changing the content of books for young people, my own interest more recently in the post-internet years has been around how 'inclusivity' has been translated into access to books. By this I don't necessarily mean access in terms of how they are physically bought or borrowed, but more in terms of how children as readers find out about books in general and, in particular, how they now find the stories they want to read.

However hard and successfully libraries and bookshops have worked in creating enticing and child-focused environments, the space between books, their authors and the readers they are writing for, needs to be navigated, and without structural change, it remains a barrier to inclusivity.

Traditionally, books have had little additionality. Beyond the quality of the story each tells, a good cover, an exciting title and a bewitching yet plausible blurb or puff from another famous author have been their only ways of muscling their way into an increasingly crowded market. And responses to them have come initially from adults. Adults have been the gatekeepers to access. Teachers, librarians and parents have selected books for children and advised them on what they might read next.

But now that is changing and, in some respects, has already changed. And it will change more. For a decade or so technology has made authors 'accessible' to children through their websites. The book is no longer a standalone item; it comes with an author, sometimes real and sometimes an 'invented' personality, who plays a role in readers' engagement and enjoyment of the book. Many readers are familiar with the website presence of authors; finding out about an author's life, writing to them and, if lucky, getting a response is a way of enriching their enjoyment of the story. This is so much so that for the last 20 years publishers have deemed that 'the author is the brand', and the 'package' is the book irrevocably combined with the very personal and particular way in which the author promotes it. At its best, this kind of promotion is done live, but that is inherently exclusive as only children from already bookish homes are likely to benefit from it. The internet overcomes that and gives access to all – or almost all.

Real or internet access to authors may with hindsight now be seen as a first step in putting children as readers closer to the books and to making their own decisions about what they want to read and why.

More recently another and possibly more dramatic change has happened: the internet has been used to create a space where children as readers can discuss books with each other. Suddenly the many adult gatekeepers, ranging from booksellers through to librarians, teachers and parents, have been replaced by peer-to-peer recommendations and advice. It was this explosion in inclusivity, this change to accesses, this 'Belonging is...' that I explored at the 34th IBBY International Congress.

So what does this new place to talk about books look like? Websites such as *The Guardian* Children's Books (www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site) enable all children to express their own thoughts on what they like to read and to find out from each other which books others are most enjoying. It is a new level of inclusivity between children and the books they read.

For the first time, through this and other internet forums – interestingly, a Norwegian delegate presented www.ubok.no, a Norwegian site for children and others to share their views about children's books – all children can their express what they think about books without adult intervention. They can find out what other children think about books and, in particular and of special importance in the context of IBBY, children from around the globe are connected through these platforms. This allows information sharing among young readers and prevents them from becoming nationalist or isolationist in their reading. This opens up books to more readers. On a far larger scale than ever before, children's views can be easily heard and reacted to. What the reader thinks is now a matter of great importance to an author.

The effect of this engagement between young readers and their open discussions about their reading experiences and tastes is not entirely known, but it seems likely or at least possible that it will have an influence on authors who listen. Away from talking or writing about books in ways that may be shaped by adult expectations, children are finding a voice. And it is a big and very loud one! Reviews from young readers show high levels of comprehension and passion; they know what they like and they love the chance to tell others about it.

Given the opportunity to pick and choose and write freely, combined with the added dimension of finding out that an author is as real as he/she is, the world of children's reading is alive and it is making its voice heard. What impact it may have on the kinds of story that shape the landscape of children's fiction in the future is not yet known, but the one thing it tells us that we can be sure of is that children's books are here to stay.

[Julia Eccleshare MBE is a journalist and writer on the subject of children's books, and is the Children's Books editor for *The Guardian* and chair of the judging panel for the Branford Boase first-novel prize. In 2001 she won the Eleanor Farjeon Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution to children's books. In September 2014 she was appointed to the new part-time role of head of Public Lending Right (PLR) policy and advocacy.]

My Lovely REGESHATA Bridge: It is a Bridge to Success that Has never Failed Anyone

Lusekelo Lucas Mwalughelo (Mama Africa)

My dear readers

While you can read and write, there are millions who can't read or write, some cannot even afford to buy a book. Whereas you have had a good education, there are those who could not afford it, or for whom it was impossible to get a good education, unlike you.

This is a story about an imaginary bridge made to personify the importance of books in my life. It aims at acknowledging the power of words and pictures inside books (electronic or in print format). The bridge is intended to create an information society with less of a digital divide, and whereby the knowledge acquired through reading can be shared and put into action, hence allowing sustainability, creativity and finding solutions to various problems affecting society. REGESHATA is an acronym for 'read more books; get knowledge and information. Share the best with the community around you and take action to spread the change'.

I happen to know of various people who were very famous and educated but who never shared the secret of their success with anyone while they lived. I hope this article will change the mindset of people with skills and knowledge to share their knowledge, and hence leave a living legacy when they die.

The more I read books, the more I was moved and inspired by people who changed the world despite various challenges in their lives; for example, Alfred Nobel, Dr Ben Carson and Nelson Mandela. Then I said to myself, I want to become like salt to people around me and the society at large because salt adds flavour, it is a preservative and a catalyst. I believe my education was paid for by taxes from hundreds of Tanzanians. Some were farmers, workers, housewives and traders, and some of these are still helpless and ignorant (can't read or write). I feel indebted to them, I feel I have a debt to pay them back, like a thanksgiving, for I believe their tireless efforts and taxes made me who I am today.

I have a passion for books and I have dedicated my life to ensure that children and youth get what I got through books. What is a library and its books to you? Probably it is a building full of dust and books, maybe you think that books are compiled works meant to be read only by educated people, or students and pupils in schools. To me books are my pillars, my dreams and my inspiration. Also a library is a house of knowledge, an eye opener and a cornerstone to my lovely REGESHATA bridge.

Why do I call it a lovely bridge? I started using books in 1989 when I was seven years old, this was due to the need to learn English. It was one of my toughest subjects back then and I had only three sentences in my word bank, which were 'Good morning teacher', 'May I go out?' and 'May I come in?'. To be frank I didn't know the meaning of these sentences, but they were very helpful in times of trouble.

Books saved me from shame and embarrassment. One day I was late to school and I was punished by two canes by the gate. When I reached the classroom, I did not know how to apologise for being late, so I used my first sentence: 'Good morning teacher'. I knew I had two remaining sentences in my word bank, and I did not know which one to use next. I said 'Please teacher, may I go out' and the whole class laughed, it was so embarrassing. So in a low voice, I used my last sentence, 'Please teacher, may I come in?' I assumed another cane session awaited me at break time.

But instead of a caning my teacher gave me a cake, juice and advice. She said to me, 'Lusekelo I know you are bright, what you need is access to books and someone to teach you English. English is a good language, you can master it by at least learning two new words every day. Go to the library, it is a house of knowledge'. That was a turning point towards books that changed my life, thanks to Mrs Temu, for she trusted in my strength at the time when no one else did.

When I went to join the library I wanted to learn English, but I came out with more than just English language. I got access to various subject and non-subject books. I was able to pass my national examinations from primary school, secondary school, high school and college. Books changed my aspirations from wanting to be a lawyer or pilot to wanting to be a librarian, especially after meeting passionate librarians. Books taught me art and handcraft through various books supplied by Book Aid International; for example, through the Teach Yourself series I was able to learn many things besides art and handcraft, such as how to use a computer. This would have been impossible without such books (the 'bridges').

Today I am a librarian working at the National Library in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Partially I feel that I have started to repay my debt to society. What I wish to create is more reading habits, and a lovely REGESHATA bridge to the mind of every child and youth in the world because I believe it is a bridge to success that has never failed anyone. What you need to know is that what you read for information needs to be up to date, reliable, authentic, accurate and useful. Then it helps you to construct your own REGESHATA bridge. In the process of practising and constructing REGESHATA bridges, I decided in 2012 to form three clubs: a reading club, a talent club and an environmental club. The last one with the aim of educating primary-school students about the importance of environmental conservation. I decided to read books on environmental issues, methods of waste disposal and characteristics of bees. I read that shade bees like mild shade and so go for fruit trees that will give them a canopy; another type consumes a lot of water so they are not advisable in water sources. Then I shared the knowledge with my friends at work, students in colleges and pupils at three schools, and the implementation went hand in hand with sensitising a reading culture. We succeeded to plant 120 trees in three schools. Today some of these trees have started to bear fruit, providing shade – a reading/resting place at break time for pupils. Some were planted at my former school. They are more than four metres high. One day I visited the school and I found a person washing her vegetable under a tree I planted. I felt relieved and so happy inside that I have played my part.

Apart from that I reached more than 5000 students in schools, 1000 youth with educational and entertainment movies, and more than 85 schools, institutions and organisations.

My advice to children and youth is that despite the science and advancements, books will remain the best source of reliable, authentic and researched information and knowledge. In Africa where digital generations are emerging, I think there is more in printed format than in electronic. Yet computers, the internet and databases have become a good and guiding way of getting access to information. However, globalisation comes with pros and cons. It is necessary to be cautious with internet materials as some have no editors.

Embrace change and keep your minds open to learn and acquire new skills, information and knowledge. Go east, go west, you will always find me at my lovely REGESHATA bridge for it is my comfortable zone. When you tell me ten reasons why you don't like to read, I will tell you a thousand reasons why reading is important. When you have an opportunity to create your own REGESHATA bridge, do it and make it lovely, as you will be remembered whenever a positive change occurs. I love books, I live books, I speak books and I dream books.

Thank you. I love you all.

[Lusekelo Lucas Mwalughelo's nickname is Mama Africa. She is City Librarian at the Tanzania National Library Service. In February 2014 she was a guest of honour at Book Aid International's 60th anniversary celebration at St James's Palace, London, where she spoke about the importance of books for children in Tanzania, of how her own love of books grew and how libraries changed her life.]

The Guardian/Stephen Spender Prize 2014 for Poetry in Translation

OTHER TOPICS

Robina Pelham Burn

The Spender Prize, which this year celebrates its tenth birthday, has had more than its share of prodigies in the junior categories. Like a doting great-aunt I keep track of their achievements, and I was delighted to hear that Phoebe Power, who won second prize in 2011 in the 18-and-under category with her richly sensuous translation of Prévert's 'Sanguine', has since won Eric Gregory and Northern Writers' awards and has been apprentice poet-in-residence at Ilkley Literature Festival; and that Anna Leader, joint first in 2013 in the 18-and-under category for her version of Jules Laforgue's 'L'hiver qui vient' has published a collection of poetry and that her third – yes, third – novel, a work of historical fiction called *A Several World*, has won the 2014 Luxembourg National Literary Prize in the Under-25 category. Many Spender Prize winners also win or are commended in the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award.

This year's 14-and-under winner, Alexia Sloane, is another prodigy. The 13 year old, who has been blind since the age of two and attends her local village school, has won more prizes than most people win in a lifetime, and has passed GCSEs in French, Spanish, Italian and Mandarin which she reads in braille. Her commentary alerted the judges to the fact that she is blind. Although she cannot see, she wrote that the images in 'J'ai lu que les poètes en Chine' transported her to China.

For those who are not familiar with the Spender Prize I should explain that entrants in all three age groups (the third being the Open category) have not only to translate a poem from any language, ancient or modern, but must also write a brief commentary that sheds light on their translation process. They are judged not only on the quality of their translated poem, but also on their commentary – Daniel Weissbort's inspired suggestion that A.S. Byatt described as 'splendidly intelligent' – gives the translators a voice and perhaps allows them to be more experimental than they may otherwise be because they can explain to readers the rationale behind their decisions.

Alexia Sloane chose to translate a beautiful and relatively simple poem by the little-known Belgian poet of the Belle Epoque, Jean Dominique (real name, Marie Closset). She admitted ruefully in her commentary that reproducing the original rhyme scheme was unworkable in English, which endeared her to judge Stephen Romer, who wrote in his report that 'an intricate rhyme scheme in the source text is one of the first things an experienced translator learns to jettison'. The judges were universally beguiled by her sensitive and fluid rendering, which included the lines:

I have read that they become intoxicated with wine and the moon
And that their verses swing like long bamboos
Between the water emerging from their hearts and the mist of their quill
Which, in their country, clings to almost everything.

This year there were four winners in the 18-and-under category since the judges decided to share the third prize between Esther Sorooshian and Rosemary Brook-Hart with their very different poems. Seventeen-year-old Esther made the bold decision to render Francis Ponge's prose poem 'La Grenouille' into verse form in English and conjured up some arresting images in the process: the rubber glove of the frog's skin will stay with me for a long time.

As sharp needles of rain
Bounce from bloated meadows,
A dwarf amphibian,
A one-handed Ophelia,
Barely a fistful, unclenching,

Flings herself from the foot of the poet

Into the next pond.

Unpin her –

She's highly strung,

Her long limbs – such pretty legs –

In the rubber glove of her skin –

No meat on them; lithe

With a grace I've seldom seen

In fish or fowl. Like mercury,

She slips through my fingers.

Engorged,

Alive,

Panting,

Her fat, beating heart.

Her shrivelled eyelids,

And drooping mouth

Move me to let her go.

Rosemary Brook-Hart came across the sixteenth century 'Vous estes déjà vieille' at sixth form college while researching Pierre de Ronsard's handling of ageing for her Extended Project Qualification. The Spender Prize judges tend not to object to versions if, as judge Stephen Romer wrote, they remain *tonally* true and Rosemary's was an audaciously witty tour de force that grabbed our attention from the beginning.

Age hangs on you like sawdust hangs on velcro –

light, but irremovable – and I am

old

as you (older, maybe? memory balks

at counting quicksand years). If we can join

our sawdust-weight of age,

let's make a spring

let's make it grow

hear the pale shoots as they push lightwards through the

ice-hard soil of winter, watch

the first

snow-

drops...

Joshua James had almost completed the first year of his English degree when he entered. Compelled to study Anglo-Saxon as part of his course, he chose to submit four translations from Anglo-Saxon, with 'Against a Wen' winning second prize in the 18-and-under category and 'Against a Swarm of Bees' commended. 'Against a Wen' is a charm to ward off warts – not the most promising of subjects for a poem – but Joshua's strongly rhythmic version with its drumming repetitions of sound transfixed the judges. Joshua chose to make a refrain of the opening incantation 'Wenne, wenne, wenchichenne', which he read to great effect in his Tyneside accent at the prize giving.

Wenne, wenne, wenchichenne,

Little boil, begone!

There, sore cyst, you'll find your brother;

He'll fetter you in ferns and reeds.

Wither under wolf's foot, wretch,

And under eagle's feather;

Hang to eagle's claw, rank whelk –

May you wither there forever.

Sputter and fade like a firecoal, wart,
And shrink as ooze shrinks on a wall,
And waste like water in a drum,
And shrivel seed-small,
Less than the
Flea's flank;
Die down to
Naught!

Wenne, wenne, wenchichenne,
Little wart, begone!

A translation from ancient Greek of the sequence in the *Iliad* when Andromache hears the news that her husband Hector is dead was the undisputed winner of the 18-and-under category. Classicist Edith Hall declared herself 'deeply touched by Sam Norman's lovingly crafted, lyrical version'. She admitted to being astonished that it had been translated by a boy (something that says as much about Edith's approach to gender as the tenderness of Sam's translation). W.N. Herbert was impressed by Sam's selection 'of a passage that worked perfectly as a contained episode, which was then subjected to a virtuoso recasting into quintains rhyming ABAAB' – the rhyme scheme Sam chose in an attempt to retain the musicality of the original Greek. Susan Bassnett recognised in her report 'the double challenge of translating across languages and across time', which Sam, Joshua and some of the adults who translated from old Irish, classical Chinese and old Norse rose to with such aplomb.

The choice of poem is of course crucial to success in the competition; it is the first hurdle for would-be entrants, who may not have read much poetry in their mother tongue, let alone a foreign one, if they are only 13 or 14. There is a skill to picking a poem that is neither too easy nor too hard, and to choosing an extract that works as a standalone poem in its own right. Most important is that the translator likes the poem she or he has chosen: no one reads a text or poem as closely as its translator. Sam Norman's love of Homer came across as strongly as Andromache's for Hektor:

And with these words she rushed out from the hall,
heart pounding, nearly mad – her maids came too –
but when she reached the teeming city wall
and stood there, looking out, among them all,
only then, she saw him and she knew.

There was Hektor, being dragged outside
the city to the hollow, Grecian ships
by quick horses – unburied, brutalised.
Then black night descended over her eyes,
enshrouding her, and the life passed from her lips...

The winning and commended translations from this and previous years can be found at www.stephen-spender.org. Free booklets may be obtained by emailing info@stephenspender.org. The 2015 competition closes on 22 May 2015 and teachers who are interested in introducing pupils to poetry translation can find some ideas and resources on the website. If any IBBY members would like to suggest activities or submit lesson plans, we should be delighted to hear from them.

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

REVIEWS

FEAST OR FAMINE?
FOOD AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



Edited by Bridget Carrington and Jennifer Harding

About Children's Literature

Feast or Famine? Food and Children's Literature

Bridget Carrington and Jennifer Harding (eds), hb. 978 1 4438 6142 7, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, £47.99, 270pp. [Discount for contributors]

It is hard to believe that the IBBY/NCRCL conferences have been running for 20 years, but here's the proof of the pudding – if I can put it like that, for it's something that this volume is particularly effective at conjuring up. We have 19 courses to go at, dealing with the use of food as both a disciplinary tool and as a celebratory indulgence, from its prodigal abundance to its life-threatening absence, across works of fiction, poetry and even non-fiction, including a look at some cookbooks, too.

It is a most handsomely produced volume, guaranteed to delectate the senses. There's a beautiful central section comprising 15 plates (or 'dishes', as one might well call some of them), only one of which is disappointing, a rather blurred image of some food from Iceland (that's the frozen-food store, not the country), obviously captured from a TV screen. Regrettably, this image is, for some reason, repeated in black-and-white (also blurred) elsewhere (p. 135) – for the volume is also rich in evocative line drawings.

Where to start on this smorgasbord? Fortunately, the editors have resisted the temptation to organise the chapters as a menu, from appetisers to desserts. We start, then, with a full-blown spread: Jean Webb examines how childhood is constructed through the motif of food in a selection of novels. She uses one of Bessie Marchant's books (an author well worth reading, by the way) to consider the domestic economy of empire, showing the extent to which children (and girls, especially) were central. Amongst other works, Webb also examines Kevin Crossley-Holland's evocative novel, *The Seeing Stone* (where a precursor of the omelette, the ravishingly named 'herbolace', is described).

Nicki Humble, in her contribution, picks up on the ambivalence of the phrase 'children cooking', which blurs the line between the cook and the cooked. She looks at a variety of preparations concocted by children in novels (such as Jo's disastrous dinner in *Little Women*) before moving on to darker images, where children become part of the food, as does Mickey in Sendak's *Night Kitchen*, and likewise Tom Kitten, when he is encased in a roly-poly pudding. As Humble points out, there's more to 'having our cake and eating it' (p. 66) than is often recognised. Sarah Layzell Hardstaff provides an intriguing and original approach in her chapter, too, where, rather than trotting out the standard trope about food being the sex of children's literature, she examines the more basic fact that food, or its lack, is often indicative of hunger and survival, resulting in fictional children sometimes stealing for sustenance – a topic she then pursues.

Pat Pinsent – a stalwart of IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conferences since their outset – is one of the other contributors to consider food in general terms, examining its occurrence in children's poetry, where she notes a general shift from its use as a device from which to evince moral lessons, to something that is celebrated in its own right, as, in Lionel Bart's terms, simply 'glorious food'. There is one other contributor who considers poetry in this volume: Anne Harvey, the broadcaster and anthologist. Unfortunately, for the person who is just reading the proceedings (not having attended the event), we have little more than a sequence of poems presented to us – a mini-anthology, in fact. More commentary on these verses would have been welcome.

There are several other authors who consider food in general terms. Gili Bar-Hillel's paper discusses problems of translation, where food items are put in 'foreign' mouths, such that what might sound exotic in the original ends up rather limp; thus the Turkish delight in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* apparently lost its

mystique in Israel when an earlier translation ('Turkish delicacy') was more accurately recast as nothing but a ubiquitous 'gelatinous sweet' in Hebrew (p. 210). As is often the case, a literal translation can be less successful than something more culturally apposite; so, in some Scandinavian translations of *Alice in Wonderland* you'll find Alice attending not a tea party, but a coffee one.

Other contributors concentrate on specific literary works. Thus Aoife Byrne examines the use of food in Oscar Wilde's fairy tales, where its presence or absence reflects the inequities of the class system in Victorian times. Anne Malewski examines Astrid Lindgren's 'Pippi Longstocking' and 'Karlson' books, where food is openly and lovingly consumed without fear of moral reprisal. In contrast, Kay Waddilove finds that, in Noel Streatfeild's novels, food functions in a more complex way, epitomising women's struggles to excel in a patriarchal world.

Equally complex is the use of food in well-known Robinsonades like *Masterman Ready* and *Coral Island*, as Simone Herrmann shows. Its provision on the respective islands is seen as providential, but there is also a sense that one must be restrained in one's consumption. Herrmann goes on to bring out the dimension of power involved, in that food can be either distributed or withheld – and, indeed, in cannibalism, food has the ultimate power: of life or death. The issue of cannibalism leads neatly into Karen Williams's discussion of the 'edible child', by which she means the child 'good enough to eat': a spectacle often put on show for adult consumption. But Williams also deals with the darker side of this child, exemplified in many of Thomas Hood's unjustly neglected works, like 'Ode to Mr Malthus' (1832), where Hood satirises Malthusian fears about a population explosion, children being seen as 'mere objects able to be obliterated en mass [sic] to preserve others' (p. 169). Links with Humble's discussion could usefully have been forged here.

While Franziska Burstyn examines a range of narratives celebrating food in Bakhtinian carnival terms (like the Grimms' 'The Sweet Porridge'), it is good to see her concentrating on one of the all-time food classics, Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1918). Two other chapters also deal more exclusively with particular texts. Rebecca R. Butler concentrates on Alex Shearer's dystopian novel *Bootleg* (2003), in which unhealthy food has been prohibited, evoking parallels with Orwell's classic *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, apart from the fact that here the insurrectionists (the chocolate-making bootleggers) emerge victorious. Finally, Rebecca Ann Long examines Paul Stewart's *Edge Chronicles*, which deal with, as she puts it, 'in visceral and often shocking detail, the effects of consumption and starvation on the inhabitants of the Edge' (p. 245). The chapter is informative in its own right, but the generous reproductions of Chris Riddell's gruesomely evocative illustrations turn it into one of the volume's high spots.

There are three other critical chapters which open up interesting areas of discussion: Sinéad Moriarty provides a most innovative piece, examining the way that Antarctic explorers like Shackleton had to deal with starvation, in the process contravening Western scruples about eating certain foods, like dog- and horse-meat; and, beyond that, in undermining the whole image of the traditional hero. Zahra Amlani's subject, children's cookbooks over the last 50 years, is also innovative, but it is, unfortunately, rather underdeveloped. Lastly under this heading, I'll mention Fiona Dunbar's contribution, since, as a creative writer (and artist), she bridges the gap to the other, 'creative' contributors. In 'Food and Body Image' Dunbar examines the disturbing spread of anorexia in ever-younger girls, reflecting on her own novel *The Truth Cookie* (2004) and its TV adaptation. It is a sound piece, although I'm not sure we need to quote a whole scene (almost three pages of primary text). Moreover, her contribution does point to the problems of mixing the creative and the critical, as they often jar: 'Now, when I agreed to do this paper, I thought it be [sic] brilliant if I could talk to a whole bunch of schoolgirls about this, get their take on it! So I did. Well, I did an online

survey ...' (p. 40). While this is an acceptable register for a presentation, it could have done with revisiting for publication.

The remaining, less academic papers also suffer from this at times. Anne Harvey's chapter on a selection of food-oriented poems, mentioned earlier, is the only one that has been written as though in retrospect, reflecting on the conference in the past tense, and ending with the comment, 'And then we all dispersed to greedily sample Judith Kerr's delicious birthday cake, a poem in itself!' (p. 31). I'm sure it was, but it seems of little relevance to those not present. The same applies to some extent to Guo Yue's presentation, which was clearly a performance in its own right (he regularly combines music and cookery on stage). This said, the material on his upbringing in Mao's China, where hunger was endemic, is movingly evocative, drawing on Yue's autobiography (he unfortunately becomes 'Geo Yue' in the bibliography). The highlight of the book for me, though, is the remaining chapter by a creative writer/artist: David Lucas. I'm ashamed to say I don't know his work. Judging from his contribution here, though, he is both a powerful writer and a gifted artist, with some wonderfully impromptu-looking sketches adorning his chapter. In essence, he deals with the power of symbolism to overcome the *either/or* dichotomy, proclaiming, always, *both/and*.

I completely endorse inclusive conferences like the IBBY UK/NCRCL MA ones, where critical and creative voices are brought together, but they do represent challenges for the editors, and I think the resultant volume would have been stronger had it been more thematically organised, and – a final pedantic gripe – with more attention given to such things as a standard layout for the bibliographies. But gripes aside (yet more alimentary imagery), this is a substantial repast, to be enjoyed and inwardly digested at your leisure.

The comprehensive index will enable you to find even the smallest morsel within the volume (unless – okay, one final gripe – you are looking for 'healthy eating', which unfortunately heads up the whole alphabetical listing).

David Rudd

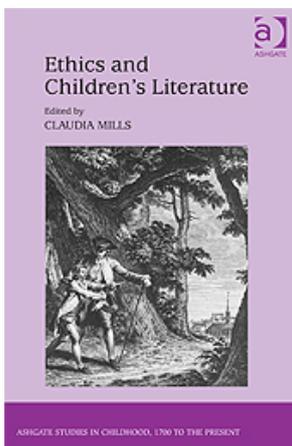
[David Rudd is Professor of Children's Literature in the Art, Design and Language Academic Group at the University of Bolton. In January 2015 he took up the post of Professor of Children's Literature in the Faculty of English and Creative Writing at the University of Roehampton.]

Ethics and Children's Literature

Claudia Mills (ed.) (Ashgate Studies in Childhood, 1700 to the Present). Farnham: Ashgate, hb. 978 1 4724 4072 3, 2014, £58.50, 279pp.

This volume emanates from a symposium held at De Pauw University, Greencastle, Indiana, contributed to by a number of distinguished academics. This collection of papers either given then or written subsequently, is divided into four sections. These examine in turn: the attempt of didactic writers to shape children into moral beings; ethical themes in a variety of texts written for children; ethical criticism of children's literature; and ethical responses to the literature. Topics range from specialised areas such as late nineteenth-century magazines published in New York (Emma Adelaide Otheguy) and Taiwanese juvenile fiction of the 1960s (Andrea Mei-Ying Wu), to Martha Rainbolt's exploration of the protagonist's development of moral consciousness in the recent popular novel trilogy and film series *The Hunger Games*.

Claudia Mills begins her Introduction with an irrefutable statement, 'Children's literature has always been a vehicle for transmitting values to young readers' (p.1), and goes on to reject some of the arguments often propounded against didacticism (children won't read it, or if they do, they will not necessarily imbibe the intended message, and in any case it results in badly written books). She shows that all books



express values of some form or another, something that is very evident in many of the most famous children's classics (such as the works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien). Therefore, she claims, 'The values expressed by a work of literature as a whole are a legitimate ground for its critical appraisal as a work of art' (p.8). Aware that such a statement could summon up the spectre of censorship, she clarifies her position: 'Ethical criticism of books can be employed not to justify censorship but to encourage sensitivity', and to foster dialogue among readers (pp.8–9). Such a process, I would suggest, could in fact contribute to young readers' development of literary insight as well as to their moral and ethical awareness.

Among the 15 papers in this collection there are discussions of fiction concerned with certain issues, such as anti-racism and death, and of the work of key authors such as Madeleine L'Engle and A.A. Milne, as well as those named above. It is impossible, however, in a short review to do justice to the range of topics covered, so I shall focus on three that seem to me to present particularly interesting viewpoints on the subject. Characteristic of all these is that their authors resist any facile conclusion but concentrate rather on raising awareness of some of the problems posed by writing for a young audience.

Jani Barker's analysis 'Virtuous Transgressors' suggests that unlike Victorian children's fiction, in which the child characters who are offered for the edification of and emulation by young readers exhibit a high level of moral perfection, the situation in contemporary children's books is often very different. For example, she shows how in the Harry Potter books the protagonist not only displays exemplary traits such as courage and love, but also shows the readiness to break rules and tell lies when such actions seem to serve a greater good. Moreover, his friend Hermione is initially 'self-righteous about her adherence to rules', to the extent of being "a nightmare" because of her tendency to judge others' behavior and the ostentatious way she displays her learning and rectitude'. Later, however, she arrives at a more relaxed position in which she is prepared to lie to protect her friends, realising that 'unwritten rules privileging relationship over abstract regulations may sometimes be more right than correct adherence to written rules' (p.119). Barker suggests that in order to be acceptable to today's readers, 'contemporary children's literature must advocate morality in ways that escape heavy-handed moralistic approaches and obtrusive didacticism' (p.120), even if at times this raises questions about other ethical issues.

In 'The Rights and Wrongs of Anthropomorphism in Picture Books', Lisa Rowe Faustino raises the question of whether the tendency to attribute human thoughts and feelings to animals, as found so often in children's literature, carries with it the danger of inculcating in young children an inaccurate understanding of our relationship with the natural world. She suggests that, unlike the situation in other disciplines throughout the social sciences and the humanities, ethical issues related to anthropomorphism have not been adequately examined in the criticism of children's literature. She observes that portraying animals as behaving in human-like ways may well have begun almost instinctually, 'but it is now culturally transmitted. Very simply we are teaching kids to think anthropocentrically before they have the critical ability to distinguish reality from fantasy' – and this at a very early, impressionable, age. She considers that, in the light of current questions about environmental ethics, the prioritisation of the human species over the rest of nature that results from such fictions at least needs more examination than it has so far received from critics (p.159).

The contribution to the debate by the editor of this book, Claudia Mills, has, for those like me whose reading of Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), is far from recent, the slightly unpromising title 'Heeding Rousseau's Advice'. She elucidates this, however, by reminding us that the French philosopher and theorist about education was concerned that attempts to dissuade young readers from a particular form of behaviour may in fact introduce them to undesirable information that they did not already possess. In

this instance, she argues 'that Rousseau's worries arise in a particularly acute form that attempts to disabuse children of morally problematic prejudices that they are assumed to hold'. She shows how two children's novels that are intended 'to challenge negative stereotypes against one particular profession and one particular disability' may in fact have an adverse effect, whereas two other books which tackle prejudices more indirectly she feels can achieve a more positive effect (p.182). She concludes that, just as authors of realistic fiction need to keep up to date about the technology used by young people, those who seek to combat problematic attitudes need to be very 'sensitive to the shifting state of societal attitudes' (p.192).

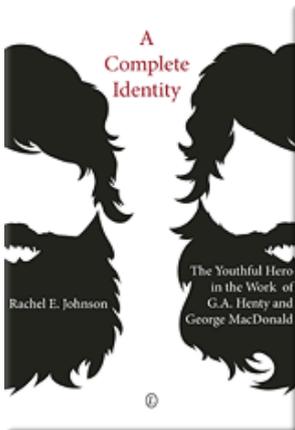
My reasons for highlighting these particular articles, out of all those in a collection that is full of interesting perspectives, relate rather to my own research interests than to any intrinsic qualities that they, and the rest of the collection, may possess. I do, however, recommend this volume for the freshness of its approach to a subject that has received rather less attention than it deserves in the field of children's literature criticism.

[This review also appears in *Network*, the journal of Women Word Spirit.]

Pat Pinsent

A Complete Identity: The Youthful Hero in the Work of G.A. Henty and George MacDonald

Rachel E. Johnson, Cambridge: Lutterworth, pb. 978 0 7188 9359 0, 2014, £22.50, 254pp.



For some aficionados of nineteenth-century children's literature, as Rachel Johnson acknowledges, the two writers who form the subject of her study are seen as polar opposites – Henty's historical/realistic novels totally contrasting with the fantasy/fairy-tale genre espoused by MacDonald. Yet Johnson shows how this dichotomy is oversimplistic: both were writing during a period of rapid imperial expansion and the colonial presuppositions which they shared with most of society at the time mean that there are many affinities, in particular in their portrayal of the hero figure. Basing her discussion on seven texts by Henty and six by MacDonald, Johnson claims that:

[these] typify the narrative techniques and ideological positioning of both authors [and] represent the hero figure in different cultures, circumstances and time periods (both actual and mythical) which emphasise aspects of his or her character. Taken together, these characteristics build the composite, identifiable persona, the ideal character of the hero figure. (p.6)

In the process of supporting this contention, Johnson provides both a thorough presentation of the historical, literary and ideological context of these writers, with relevant biographical detail and a demonstration of the many points of contiguity between them.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Britain experienced economic problems by comparison with continental Europe, and consequently looked rather towards expansion further afield. The novels and short stories of both Henty and MacDonald, in a variety of ways, provide the hero figures for which Victorian society craved, as evidenced, for instance, by the writing of Thomas Carlyle (p.50).

In a chapter entitled 'Genre, Mode and Ideology', Johnson challenges the dichotomy between realism and fairy tale by demonstrating how often these two elements are to be found together in the work of both authors. Henty's basically realistic *The Tiger of Mysore* (1896), for instance, is based on actual events of the previous century, but nevertheless has embedded elements of the more traditional 'quest' tale, while MacDonald's fantasy *At the Back of the North Wind* (1872) begins with a strongly realistic setting in contemporary London and constantly slides between the two genres.

Johnson goes on to illustrate similar oscillations in the other works of both authors. Both authors subject their heroes to a 'wilderness' experience: for Henty, this place of 'proof' for the hero is that of empire, whereas for MacDonald it is an 'internal or subconscious' space (p.90).

Johnson links the Victorian construct of the child with the cultural view of the hero, and also notes the contemporary tendency to represent the colonised subject as a child. She explores a range of categories of hero who in various ways contribute to the ideal hero: the 'classical' and 'adventure' heroes display the courage and initiative, while the fairy-tale hero contributes compassion and self-sacrifice, a composite picture balanced by several female heroes in the work of Henty and in MacDonald's partially feminised characters such as Diamond.

She also observes how both authors give some attention to the danger of corruption within society, caused by moral degeneration. This is perhaps most vividly displayed in the goblins of MacDonald's Curdie books (1872, 1882), but is also seen as a danger for the Henty hero who is constantly in contact with people who are at what is portrayed as a 'less developed stage of political evolution than are the English' (p.189).

Johnson's analysis of her chosen representative texts well supports her contention that 'Henty wrote apparently historical stories ... with a fairy tale structure and a fairy tale ending. MacDonald wrote fairy tales addressing realistic issues of the same historical time' (p.204). Her book thus should not only motivate readers to look again at classic MacDonald stories which are perhaps less familiar today than they used to be, but also to resurrect some of the Henty novels now all too easily consigned to neglect because they are thought to reflect an attitude towards colonialism about which today we are likely to feel somewhat uneasy. Some of the over-facile readings of both authors are dispelled in this scholarly work.

Pat Pinsent

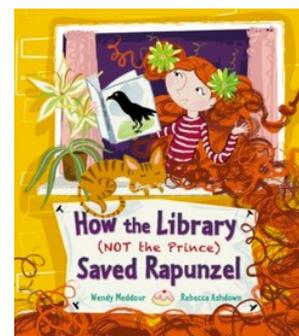
Picture Books

How the Library (NOT the Prince) Saved Rapunzel

Wendy Meddour, illus. Rebecca Ashdown Petrie, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0432 7, 2014, £11.99, 32pp.

What is it like to live 'on the sixteenth floor of a tall tower block', with the lift sometimes out of order? What is it like to be named after a character in a fairy story? Does it define you, make your life one that is foretold? This book sets out to explore these questions as the heroine finds her own way through the ordinary problems of everyday life. A good head of hair may be deemed a crowning glory, but a cliché is not a reliable guide to finding satisfaction in life. Indeed the cover illustration and the title suggest that this Rapunzel may not be trapped in her namesake's story. She holds a book entitled 'Know Your Crows'. The title of the book we are to read suggests that the library can be a place of liberation. Lively illustrations fill the end pages and support this theme. Set against a pale backdrop of shelves stacked with books, assorted cats (nine lives) inhabit this space alongside a pigeon (homing, aerial messenger), two ladybirds (luck), red toadstools (magic) and a mounted toy soldier (imaginative play). The frontispiece shows Rapunzel cramming her flame-coloured locks under a beret as she looks in her mirror. Does this signify reality, magical possibilities, or both?

The opening page portrays Rapunzel's world as seen by two blackbirds perched in a tree looking up at the tower block with its multiple residential units depicted in miniature. Far below is a busy world from which Rapunzel seems detached. The milkman cannot get her attention, although he implores her, in rhyme, to 'let down your hair'. She ignores him, the postman, the baker, her aunt bearing a fish pie and the flashy prince on a motor scooter bringing conventional gifts (he does not press his suit).



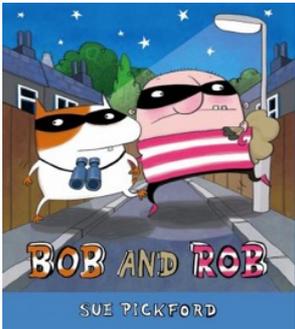
Concerned for her welfare, her friends toil up many flights of stairs with their offerings. Nourished by fish pie Rapunzel comes to life as she reads her letter: 'I've got a new job at the library'. Vitality restored, she repairs the lift for her guests to depart. In the closing pages we see her in her element, a busy, popular librarian. 'For along with her hair and her ravishing looks, she loved nothing better than reading good books'! Once a listless daydreamer, she tried on different hats (if you have been reading the pictures closely), perhaps hoping that appearances can transform you, but lacking the enthusiasm or imagination to make something happen. Finally we see her fully engaged in her life – reading, making music, dancing, learning languages, finding out about the universe down to the smallest detail.

Every library should display a copy of this lovely book. The lively rhyming text flows, carrying the reader along with a sense of pleasure and fun as it weaves its way through the exuberant and colourfully illustrated pages. Wendy Meddour and Rebecca Ashdown Petrie are well matched and have done their heroine proud. By taking her fate into her own hands Rapunzel shows us that inspiration and liberation come from reading library books!

Judith Philo

Bob and Rob

Sue Pickford, London: Frances Lincoln, pb. 978 1 8478 0409 9, £6.99, 2014, 32pp.

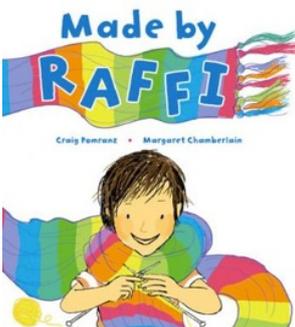


Rob is a burglar, and he's bad – really bad! He likes nothing more than playing tricks on people and stealing loot. Bob is a dog, and he's good – really good! Despite his misgivings about his owner, Bob remains a loyal accomplice to Rob. One night, whilst out on a heist, the criminal duo spies some inviting packages through the window of a house. Unable to resist, they steal them all. On returning home, guilt sets in for Bob, who secretly returns the parcels to their owner. The consequences of this act are somewhat unexpected for both Rob and Bob, which leads to a satisfying end to the story. The bold, colourful illustrations in this book are full of detail and humour, while the endpapers tie in with the story to provide further discussion points. The Burglars' Dog Convention is a particularly entertaining scene, and could be brought to life when read aloud with voices for each dog. Different fonts, as well as speech bubbles, add variety to the presentation of the text. Vocabulary has been thoughtfully selected to tell the story ('preferably', 'spectacular', 'scurried', 'prowl'). In places, however, the vocabulary could offer more to younger readers' language development ('sad', 'rubbishy'). Overall, the images, events and characters make this a likeable tale, and readers may be intrigued to find out whether Rob and Bob have any further adventures.

Kerenza Ghosh

Made by Raffi

Craig Pomranz, illus. Margaret Chamberlain, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 8478 0433 4, 2014, £12.99, 40pp.



Raffi is different from the other children at school – he's shy, he doesn't like noisy games, and sometimes he is teased by his peers. One day, when a teacher shows Raffi how to knit, everything changes. Inspired by the many beautiful colours available in the local wool shop, Raffi decides to make a scarf for his dad's birthday. At every opportunity, Raffi knits, even on the school bus where he is teased by the other children. His parents reassure him that it is perfectly acceptable for boys to knit, and that it is positive to have diverse interests. When the teacher announces that the class play is to be next week, Raffi sets about sewing a cape for the Prince, to be played by one of his classmates. This gains him kudos, and everyone wants something made by

Raffi. He finds his place amongst the other children and dreams of one day being a famous designer. The vibrant illustrations provide a positive portrayal of diversity and inclusion. The story does not labour the message that everyone should be valued no matter what his or her talents and hobbies. It presents the idea that activities do not need to be gender biased, and it celebrates difference and creativity. This book would be accompanied well with other stories that make reference to knitting (*Extra Yarn* by Mac Barnett, illus. Jon Klassen (2012), and *The Hueys and the New Jumper* by Oliver Jeffers (2012)), along with yarn bombing!

[For illustrations from Oliver Jeffers *The Hueys and the New Jumper*, see www.oliverjeffers.com/picture-books/hueys-the-new-jumper.]

Kerenza Ghosh

The Cat, the Dog, Little Red, the Exploding Eggs, the Wolf and Grandma's Wardrobe

Diane and Christyan Fox, London: Words and Pictures, hb. 978 1 9102 7700 3, £11.99, 2014, 32pp.

In the spirit of Jon Scieszka's *Stinky Cheese Man*, Diane and Christyan Fox offer an amusing take on the story of Little Red Riding Hood, as a cat tries to read the traditional tale to a sceptical dog who interrupts, wilfully misreads and questions the course of the narrative and the motives of the characters. It's not a bad basic idea, even if it has been done before in different ways, but here it doesn't seem to work. Most of the action takes place between the cat and the dog, and is driven by their dialogue. This is presented in the manner of a Schulz Peanuts cartoon, concentrating on the main characters with very little background. Presented in standard picture-book format, this creates a design challenge that has not really been met, with the book paradoxically featuring both a great deal of text and expanses of empty white space, with a small cat and dog sometimes pushed to the margins of the page. This creates the impression of an idea not sufficiently exploited pictorially nor extended well beyond its narrative capacity. I could imagine it reduced to the length of a Schulz Peanuts cartoon or expanded so that we get both the traditional story and the dog's version run against one another in the illustrations. As it is, it seems rather thin.

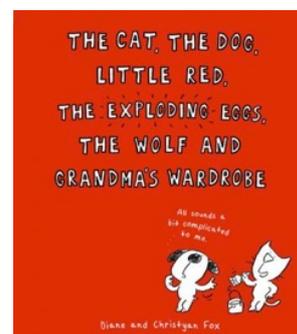
Clive Barnes

Something about a Bear

Jackie Morris, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 8478 0516 4, £12.99, 2014, 32pp.

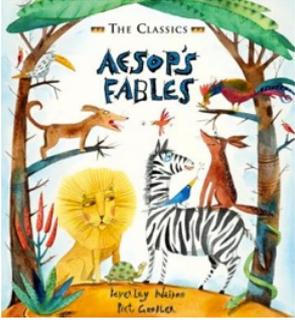
There are many types of wild bear in the world and Jackie Morris looks at eight of them in this book: the Brown bear, Giant panda, Sloth bear, Spectacled bear, Moon bear, Polar bear, Sun bear and Black bear. Each type is featured in its natural habitat, and the text describes some of their activities, which include hunting, looking after their young and being aware of predators. The bears and their cubs are illustrated in beautifully produced double-page spreads with lots of detail of their surroundings, including neighbouring animals. Each watercolour illustration can be explored by the reader: from the many bears on land who feed on the ground or those like the Spectacled bear who feed in trees, to the Polar bear swimming majestically through the water. There is more information in the back of the book about each type of bear, which extends the use of this book beyond the pictures and text. This picture book is a real joy to look at and can be enjoyed by a wide age range of children, as well as adults. It takes children into the world of wild bears and then returns them safely home by ending with: 'Of all the bears in the world, the very best bear in the world is ... your bear'.

John Dunne



Novels and Tales

Aesop's Fables



Beverly Naidoo (text) and Piet Grobler (illus.), London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0530 0, £12.99, [2011] 2014, 48pp.

This attractive book is in the publisher's The Classics series. It is almost square and quite large (270 mm × 214 mm) but easily handled by an adult so that both the reader and child can view and discuss the contents.

Beverley Naidoo was born in South Africa and has written several books for children, one of which won the Carnegie Medal. Piet Grobler grew up on the family farm on the Springbok Flats in Nylstroom in the Limpopo Province bushveld, South Africa, and attended local schools. His childhood was spent in nature, playing with animals, and drawing and reading for hours. He is the recipient of many international illustration awards.

The collection retells 16 fables, portrayed in an African setting. In Naidoo's preface to the reader she states: 'I think that Aesop was African. He was probably captured somewhere in North Africa and forced to go to Greece. His name sounds like the old Greek word for black African: "Ethiop".' Of her own introduction to the fables, she says: 'I was hooked by Aesop's fables when I was a child. I knew a lot of the animals in his tales because I grew up in South Africa. ... We had cunning jackals rather than Aesop's "foxes" and grumpy warthogs instead of "boars".' Describing the fables, she says: Most of the fables have a moral. ... [They] aren't like fairy tales from Europe with "happy ever after" endings. They are much more like traditional African stories. Life is tough – and things can go badly for anyone who doesn't watch out or use their wits!

The endpapers depict four animals: a snake, a jackal, a bird (that doesn't seem to appear in any story illustration) and a lion. Grobler's illustrations work magnificently with the text – often telling more than the words. They are above and below the text and also have some full pages to themselves. The colours are just right for the African landscapes. All the pages except those with only illustration are bordered, some just with patterns, others with plants, animals and birds. Every reader will spend as much or more time looking at the illustrations as the text.

Looking at the titles, the lion and jackal are the most popular and each in four. A few words will be unfamiliar to non-Africans: 'rinkhal', 'klipspringer', 'kudu' and 'tomboti'. Other unfamiliar words are used within the stories. I say 'unfamiliar' but I am not a good judge and may have also missed some as I have lived in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and visited South Africa as a tourist and to stay with friends and relatives. So many of the words are familiar to me. However, I still had to look at the footnotes for some words, e.g. 'brak' and 'Sjoe!', although often meaning can be taken from the illustration or context. I don't know if such an interruption will be irritating or if it will enhance thought or discussion.

I am sure that this is a book that will be enjoyed by every adult and child of whatever age. The illustrations will be captivating to the very youngest and as the child grows, the fables will be enjoyed for their story – and, of course, the morals! Naidoo has shorted the morals and given each in a prominent line below each fable. Readers will be tempted to quote them in appropriate circumstances as they are concise and short! This one is from 'The Eagle and the Tortoise':

Just wishing for something doesn't make it happen.

The story tells of a tortoise who wants to fly like the eagle.

'You're not built for flying,' warns Eagle.

'I've watched how you birds do it, said Tortoise. 'I can wave my flippers in the air. Just get me up there and I'll show you. ... Eagle carries him up into the sky. ...

‘Now then, let’s see you fly! cried Eagle ...

[The tortoise] fell like a stone, and when he struck the ground he was smashed into a thousand pieces.

Well, no delicate ending there!

‘The Farmer and the Chicken’ is very cunning. It tells of a dying farmer who is worried that his children will not take proper care of his land:

‘My children,’ he whispered, ‘I am about to die. But I want you to know that hidden among my fruit trees is something of great value. Dig and you will find it.’

...

So, as soon as he was dead ... they began to dig. There had been little rain and the red earth was hard, but they kept at it, turning the soil over and over until not a bit was left unturned.

They found nothing. But because the soil was dug so well, the fruit trees bore wonderful fruit for many years to come.

Work is real treasure.

So clever! I won’t spoil your enjoyment of this captivating book any more. Although expensive, it needs to be a hardback.

Jennifer Harding

Amina (Through My Eyes series)

J.L. Powers, London: Allen & Unwin, pb. 978 1 7433 1249 0, £5.99, 2013, 183pp.

What might it be like to live in a war zone? To live under the constant fear of a knock on the door? To see your father dragged away by soldiers and never hear of him again? This is the experience of Amina whose home is Mogadishu, capital of Somalia. We are introduced to her as she becomes old enough to experience the anxieties and worries of being a teenager; anxieties that are heightened because, under the extreme Muslim rule enforced by the militaristic al-Shabaad party, her ideas, her dreams, her ambitions are forbidden. However – and the author is careful to make this clear – such restrictions are not necessarily part of Islam. Any rebellion on Amina's part is not against her faith or culture.

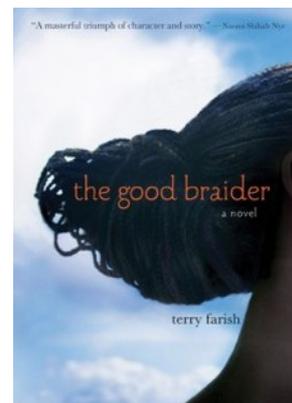
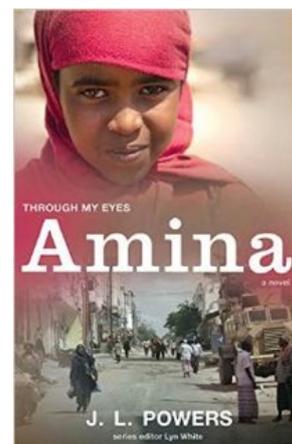
Amina is an attractive character and one with whom young readers of all backgrounds will be able to empathise and sympathise. For some, sadly, her experience may mirror theirs; for others, it will open a window. The prose style is easy and undemanding, factual background neatly packaged within Amina's experiences and views. This would – indeed should – be welcome in any library: home, school and public. This is an attractive and useful series.

Ferelith Hordon

The Good Braider

Terry Farish, Las Vegas, NV: Skyscape, pb. 978 1 4778 1628 8, ~£5.22, 2013, 221pp.

Meet Viola. She is a young girl from Southern Sudan, Juba in fact, who is now living in the USA. She tells her story in a simple yet powerful way. We are introduced to her life in a war-torn country, where even a walk to fetch water can result in tragedy, and where ambitions that may be taken for granted in the West are unthinkable. Viola and her mother make it to the States; a journey some young readers may recognise. But is it the Utopia she hoped for? She finds herself with divided loyalties and wishes, again a situation many will recognise. How can she be true to her own culture while embracing a new one?



Terry Farish has taken the experiences of young Sudanese girls who have made this journey, learnt through interviews and conversations, and turned them into this engrossing, moving story. By deciding to write it as a free-verse novel, she creates an immediacy that might be lacking if told in straightforward prose. The reader really does feel they are party to Viola's thoughts and experience – even the horrendous rape she is subjected to at the hands of a soldier. But – and this is masterly – this is not dwelt on gratuitously. It is part of the burden Viola must carry and deal with. Again, there will be readers who will recognise this. Viola is a very real person, a recognisable young adult like many British and Americans. She is also Sudanese. How can she keep this identity? Here, it is through the distinctive hair braiding that African women adopt. This is not a fashion statement, we are told, but a much more complex expression of ideas and status. Like language, it is a way of belonging, but it also allows one to look out rather than in. I was left wondering how I would keep my cultural identity if placed in Viola's situation.

This is an inspiring read and is to be highly recommended to both young adult readers and adults. Sadly at present it is only available in the States and so unlikely to be stocked by many public libraries. It deserves to be published here. It is available on Amazon UK Marketplace.

Ferelith Hordon

Information Books

Welcome to the Family

Mary Hoffman, illus. Ros Asquith, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 8478 0461 7, £11.99, 2014, 32pp.



Following their successful collaboration on Frances Lincoln's *Great Big Book of Families* and *Great Big Book of Feelings*, Hoffman and Asquith here examine the diversity of family structures in which today's young children may find themselves and their friends. This new picture book begins sensibly with the acceptance that some people don't live with their immediate family but prefer living alone, with friends or just with a partner (although, of course, most of these will still be members of a family). It then describes a variety of family structures and the ways in which children can enter them, including single parent, adoptive, gay, foster and step-families, and the processes of IVF and surrogate motherhood. Mary Hoffman's text is straightforward and careful in approach, conversational and reassuring in tone. Its key words are those that reflect the wide possibilities of human experience and resist establishing limiting norms of behaviour: 'some', 'sometimes', 'usually', 'might', 'may', 'like' and 'prefer' are all words that recur. And, when addressing the place of children in every family, Hoffman is resolutely positive: they are 'welcome' or 'very welcome' in all situations. Yet she recognises that there may be difficulties in particular families: the 'blending' of two families, for instance, when a parent finds a new partner who already has children. And, in any family, there may be unhappy times. Further, the text forms only the scaffolding of the narrative; it is Asquith's illustrations that are the important part of the book and that immediately invite and shape the reader's response. Asquith's ability to expand, comment on and humanise the text with humour and some gentle pathos, unfailingly engages the reader's interest and empathy. She unobtrusively provides the specific details of family life, and the range of emotional experiences of parents and children within any family. As an additional link with the child reader, there is also a small lonely teddy bear, whose own search for a family throughout the book provides a sweet, amusing and slightly poignant commentary on the proceedings. There are some subjects here that may provoke further discussion between child readers and adult carers, and that can only be a good thing.

There is only so much you can cover in a book for younger children but, as with their previous books, Hoffman and Asquith show how to deal with an essential but potentially difficult subject with a sureness and lightness of touch that succeeds in being both informative and enchanting.

Clive Barnes

My Big Barefoot Book of Wonderful Words

Sophie Fatus, Oxford: Barefoot Books, hb. 978 1 7828 5091 5, £14.99, 2014, 48pp.

This book really lives up to its title. Over 700 words (according to the publisher) caption its lively and entertaining illustrations. It tells the simple story of a single, typical day in the life of a family, but uses each event within the day to illustrate a broader range of activities as well as many different people. Thus a trip into town to go to the library shows not only the town and library, and a range of jobs people do, but also the work going on on a building site, and then develops into the kinds of home people live in around the world. Similarly, the trip home on the bus looks at the countryside they pass through, but then leads on to opportunities for readers to talk about different modes of transport and different types of weather. The figures illustrated come from many different backgrounds and have differing abilities, but this is done in an unobtrusive and inclusive way: a child reads a Braille book in the library and another with a hearing aid plays on a swing in the park.

Each topic takes a large double-page spread and the large format (300 × 255mm) gives plenty of room for both illustrations and text. These stand out particularly well on the plain white backgrounds of the discussion pages, and are also clear to read on the colourful pages containing the story, where they contribute to the sense of ‘busyness’ of the family’s day.

Aimed at 2–6 year olds, this is a lovely book for adults to share with children, to discuss the pictures and to talk about the words. The language is suitable for both native English speakers and children for whom it is an additional language. It certainly does not underestimate a child’s ability to extend her/his vocabulary: I learned a new name myself – geodesic dome!

Sue Mansfield

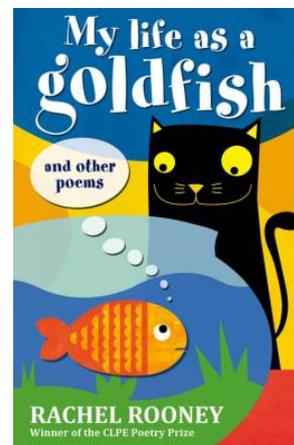
Poetry

My Life as a Goldfish and Other Poems

Rachel Rooney, illus. Ellie Jenkins, London: Frances Lincoln Children’s Books, pb. 978 1 8478 0482 2, £6.99, 2014, 96pp.

This is another book in Janetta Otter-Barry’s series of poetry books for children that she initiated in 2011. At the IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference that year she described the series as ‘following her enthusiasm to promote single-poet collections, which has resulted in a new venture of four publications a year, including one newly published poet, mainly for primary-school age. The books have a small print run, and carry illustrations; they are intended to be fun and not too literary.’

The books are small (198 mm × 129 mm), easily handled and easily stuffed into a rucksack or satchel. The inside of the books have no colour, with the illustrations all in black and white. The author of this book, Rachel Rooney, trained as a special-needs teacher and currently works with children with autism. She also teaches poetry workshops for West Sussex’s Gifted and Talented Programme, and leads workshops in schools as a visiting poet.



As you can see, the cover is bright and attractive, in line with the rest of the series, and has a menacing picture of a cat eyeing a goldfish in its bowl – I sense that the goldfish is aware of danger. The poem it is illustrating – the poem of the book’s title describes the event as the cat hops from the TV to the plant pot to the books, which is when the goldfish becomes aware of the cat’s presence ‘CAT!’ This is followed by the cat hopping on the various objects again until ‘CLAW! But did the goldfish escape? Who knows?’

The book opens with ‘Wide Open’ describing ‘My magic eye’ watching a chick hatch. But this is a subtle poem with wider implications:

My magic eye sees the beak of baby chick
before the eggshell has broken.

It catches the sun as it squints
and the stars as they wink at me.

My magic eye has discovered an unnamed planet
spinning at the edge of the galaxy.

...

Yesterday it spied on your nightmares
and tomorrow it will spy on your dreams.

My magic eye is wide open.

The publisher describes the collection as including: ‘a monster’s lunch, a wolf boy, Monday mornings, monkeys, headlice, Christmas, making friends, goldfish – and lots more. Full of jokes, surprises and puzzles, but also sensitive and thought provoking.’

Some intriguing titles are three poems headed ‘Nursery Rhyme Adverts’, a series headed ‘Creature Speaks’, two poems headed ‘Poems for Coldean School’ (‘Violet’ and ‘Indigo’) and ‘X’. To pick out a few of my favourites. ‘Home Time’ is narrated by a clock on a school-room wall:

It’s five past three.
Sixty-four eyes look at me.
No. Sixty-two.
Not Matthew.
He hasn’t learnt to read my face.
He’s got digital. A disgrace.
I reach to ten.
The school bell sounds and then ...

I leave you to savour the rest!

‘Lonely Heart’ is one of the ‘Nursery Rhyme Adverts’, a riff on Little Red Riding Hood:

Handsome, lean wolf,
likes acting and cooking.
Tired of old grannies,
is currently looking for lady in red
with plump and soft skin
to share walks in the forest
and ...

I won’t spoil the ending for you!

The illustrations are sparse and not every page has a sketch. One that did catch my eye is opposite ‘Don’t Move the Goalpost’, which tells of a bossy child whose friend eventually gets fed up and walks away, leaving the bossy child saying in the last stanza:

Don’t go. I didn’t mean it.
I can’t play on my own.

The full-page illustration for this poem shows the jumper that the bossy child had instructed his 'friend' to remove in the bottom left, the football, now abandoned, in the middle of the page and the 'friend' walking away in the top right. It says it all.

Rachel Rooney's debut collection *The Language of Cat* won the 2012 CLPE Poetry Award and was reviewed by Pat Pinsent in *IBBYLink* 34 (Summer 2012). This collection gets under the skin of a child's perspective and certainly lives up to Rooney saying: 'that she [is] writing ... [for] the child in herself, and wanting to widen the range of "childhood"'. I am sure this book will be at least shortlisted for the next award. I have really enjoyed it and have read some of the poems many times and am sure I shall be reading them often. I look forward to more in this series.

Here is the final poem in the book, 'Magic':

Magic slips
between the
cracks in
real life.
One day
you will
step on
it.

From *My Life as a Goldfish* by Rachel Rooney, published by Frances Lincoln Ltd
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Jennifer Harding

The 22nd Annual IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference will take place at Roehampton University, London, on Saturday 14 November 2015. The title will be announced shortly, along with a call for papers. Information will then be posted on the IBBY UK website www.ibby.org.uk/ and on the NCRCL blog <https://ncrcl.wordpress.com/>.

The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 43, Summer 2015 (copydate 30 April 2015) and will be on the topic of fairy tales.

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

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

Titles for Review

Publishers and others with books to be reviewed in *IBBYLink* should send them to Judith Philo at 194 Tufnell Park Road, London E7 0EE; jphilo@waitrose.com.

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Editor: Ferelith Hordon

Associate editor: Jennifer Harding

Reviews editor: Judith Philo

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

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