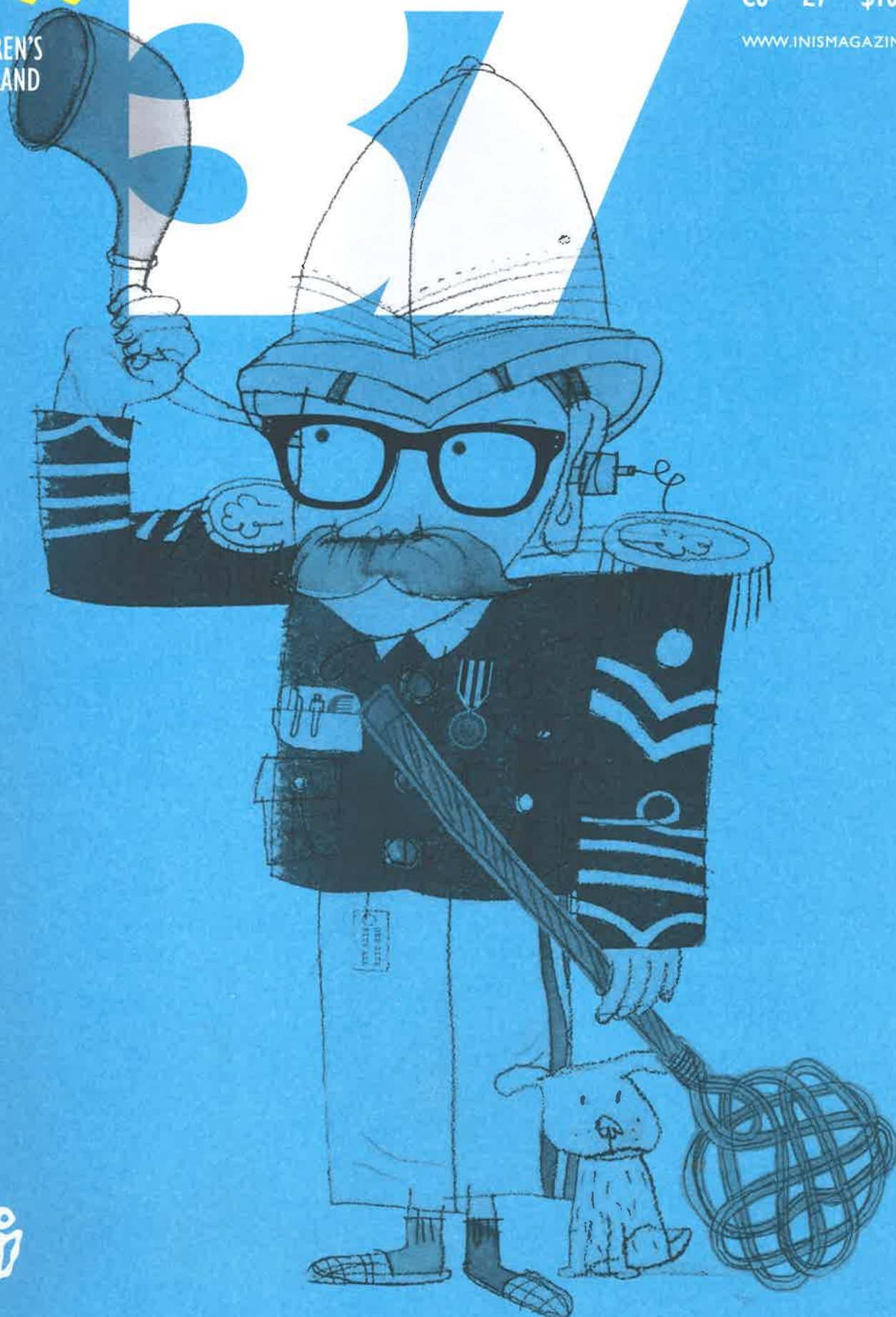


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Cover image from *The Frank Show*
by David Mackintosh. HarperCollins
Children's Books, 2012.

EDITORIAL

There is nothing quite as exciting as being handed a hot-off-the-press *Inis*. The weight and touch of the pages combined with the heavy ink smell never fail to induce the sense of accomplishment. *Inis* 37 marks one year since the relaunch of the magazine; what better time than now to ask whom are we serving. Paula McGeever's letter in this issue raises some questions and your input is always welcome.

During February and March, we had a series of guest pieces by publishers of Irish-language texts for young people on the status and situation of publishing as *Gaeilge* for children on the *Inis* blog. We have presented a sample of these here and hope that this feature supports a valuable conversation around this important area.

And while your perspective is sought ... who did *you* nominate for Laureate na nÓg? Siobhán Parkinson talks about her experiences during her term as the inaugural children's laureate and about the importance of libraries and access to an enriching range of texts for children, and also the wider community of the world of ideas.

As you may have noticed, the Children's Books Ireland Book Awards have been announced – notably without their long-term moniker, the Bisto. The awards have been an established institution in Irish children's literature for more than 20 years and have an exciting and intrepid future in store. Congratulations to all of those shortlisted, the judging panel for their difficult decisions, and to this year's winner, Celine Kiernan, for a year of exciting and memorable reads.

This year has had a busy start too with some of the *Inis* and Children's Books Ireland team making their way to the Bologna Children's Book Fair. The year 2012 is our fourth representing the magazine at the fair and it is always a great opportunity to meet publishers and share ideas, immerse ourselves in the best of international illustration and books for

young audiences, and get a glimpse of the year ahead, bringing discoveries of new voices and stories from beloved authors.

The authors and illustrators interviewed in this issue demonstrate the range and diversity of styles and approaches in contemporary children's literature. This year, 2012, is the 25th anniversary of Korky Paul's bestselling Winnie the Witch series and he gives us an insight into his creative process and journey with this popular character. Meanwhile the compelling elegance of Meg Rosoff's writing and the uncompromising vision of Melvin Burgess are committed to exploring and honouring the complexities and authenticities of teenage experience. Andrew Whitson and Caitríona Hastings share some stories from their collaborative work on picturebooks with the Irish-language publishing company, An tSnáthaid Mhór. Bringing us very much into the challenges and context of 21st-century narratives, we hope that you enjoy the features on children's literature engagement with commodification and consumer culture as well as with the world of multimedia literacy, digital storytelling and apps.

There is a broad cross section of new releases reviewed – moving from the *Phoenix* weekly comic, breathing new life into the DFC series, to debut bestsellers from Ireland and further afield. John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and RJ Palacio's *Wonder* pull on the heartstrings of our reviewers, while the Irish picturebook renaissance continues with new books by Chris Haughton, *Oh No, George!*, Chris Judge, *The Great Explorer*, and David Mackintosh, *The Frank Show* – all featured in this issue.

Sarah Crossan's verse-driven novel, *The Weight of Water*, plays with readers' perceptions of form and becomes an instant favourite while Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles explore other forms of storytelling in their essential *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling*.

Patricia & David

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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

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17 North Great George's Street
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Enjoyed *Inis*? Hated it?
Tell us what you think – now's your chance to
join the conversation and appear in the pages.

Dear Editors

I have somewhat mixed opinions about the changes at *Inis*. Firstly, I would like to begin by congratulating everybody involved for work well done. The magazine has always been a valuable resource for teachers, librarians, parents, academics – and even some children. There are many layers to the onion of who reads children's literature and why? Why, for example, are there adult groups who meet to discuss their interest in children's books? Are children's books canonical? Are they classifiable as literature? Deserving of academic study? Overwhelmingly, the answer would appear to be that, yes, the books are deserving of closer examination, critical attention, and it usually falls to the adults to do this. There are many websites devoted to children's literature, but *Inis* stood out as a hard copy resource. The articles were timely, well written, well researched and the reviews were plentiful. Keeping up with new publications was easy. No book or author seemed excluded or exempt. When I first became aware of the proposed changes, it sounded like a good idea: a website which would take all the reviews and news, and thus complement the dead tree version. I thought that the print version might take on a more academic or scholarly tone, and that the reviews therein could be harsher or more critical.

A year has passed and I have reservations. Not just about *Inis* but about CBI generally. I feel that the magazine was once a highly visible presence in libraries and schools. It was eagerly awaited and a resource. I feel now that it has become esoteric, sparse. The website is there – but personally, I have found it hard to navigate. There is a wealth of information on it, and this is daunting. It is hard to know when a book may have been published, or perhaps title or author is unknown, which can make a book review difficult to locate.

I have criticisms about the first 'new' *Inis* of last year, mainly about the quality and texture of the paper, and what felt like a sparse layout – mainly subjective criticisms. I feel that a website to run alongside a quarterly magazine would work better. While the online resource is a good idea, I don't believe it is time to kill off the physical magazine. I realise the importance of keeping up with technological innovation, and that it is arguable that we 'read' differently now, but I think the website and the publication need, as it were, their roles and remit clarified. I also feel that *Inis* and CBI are failing to make an impact beyond the greater Dublin area, as a significant amount of people in the rest of the country are unaware that a group like CBI even exists. *Bookfest*, for example, is a way of sharing a wonderful resource. Again, I feel it is a question of perhaps defining the remit more clearly. Who are CBI? What are they about? Who can join? What does *Inis* stand for? Is it scholarly or more general? How can the existence of such a great and worthy resource be made more widely known? I am very interested in hearing other opinions. Am I being too harsh? I must confess that I don't think so. As the only print magazine in Ireland that I know of devoted to children's books, *Inis* can afford to be purely academic, or purely about publishing news, or purely a resource for schoolteachers and parents. It would appear that it needs to be all things to all people. I am very interested in canvassing opinion about how this can be achieved.

Kind regards

Paula McGeever

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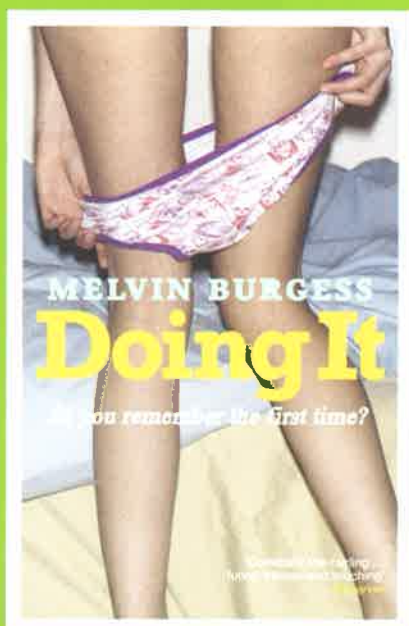
**MAKING STORIES OUT OF STORIES:
THE
FOUND
FICTION OF
MELVIN BURGESS**

Claire Hennessy

Photo of Melvin Burgess
by Caterina Clifford

Melvin Burgess's novels have achieved as much notoriety as acclaim over the last two decades due to their unflinching commitment to representing the full range and 'reality' of teenage experience. He shares his views on the importance of honesty and the power of stories with fellow young-adult writer, Claire Hennessy.

'Adolescence goes on a lot longer than people think it does.'



Doing It
Melvin Burgess

Penguin, 2004
Paperback, 336pp
ISBN 9780141018034

Melvin Burgess believes in stories. 'Everybody makes a story out of stuff,' he says. 'When you come back from work, and your partner says "how was your day" – you make a bit of a story out of it.' It's often the stories that people are in the middle of which they can't fully articulate themselves – 'you don't normally make a story until after you've left it for a bit' – that he concentrates on in his realistic work for young people. *Junk* (1996), focusing on drug-addicted teenagers, won the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. Burgess rightly describes it as the book that made his name. His latest novel, *Kill All Enemies*, similarly gives a voice to people who have stories to tell but who are rarely heard. It depicts three characters at a PRU (pupil referral unit), where students excluded from school are sent, and invites readers to empathise with the kind of teenager who may be violent, disruptive and difficult in school but at home is, as Burgess puts it, 'heroic', often shouldering adult responsibilities far before they should.

Kill All Enemies began as a television project, originally commissioned by Lime Pictures for Channel 4, but when 'their politics changed', the research was used for a novel instead. As with many of his other novels, he employs polyphony as a narrative device (a bit like doing an impersonation, he remarks), giving us the voices of Billie, who took care of her whole family when her alcoholic mum could not, only to be rejected when her mother recovered; Rob, who loves heavy metal and his mother but most certainly not his abusive stepfather; and Chris, an infuriatingly clever middle-class kid who goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid complying with school regulations. Each of them is based on a real-life individual, with certain incidents and even certain lines taken directly from their experience. There is a moment in the book where Rob's stepfather asks him where his mother is and he reflects, 'I am going to betray the woman who gave birth to me', a quote from one of the boys interviewed, and one which helped crystallise the character and his voice. When talking to people, Burgess says, 'you get everything – you get the character, you get the story, the circumstances, the voice, the opinion, the feelings, all there.'

He refers to these stories based on real stories as 'found fiction', though it's clear from his description of shaping the work that it's very much a transformative process, much more so than in 'found poetry'. When interviewing his subjects, he makes it clear that he'll be changing the details: 'I'd made it clear it wasn't a straightforward documentary. This was using them as a starting point.' (People are suspicious of TV journalists, he notes, but rather pleased to be involved with a book.) He wanted them to read it, certainly, and sent them the manuscript as he was working on it – 'I don't know whether any of them read it!' he admits – but in real life, the characters never crossed paths. The earlier parts were easier to write than the later sections:

You've got that initial thrust from them, and then you try to make those three stories work as a book – it is the difficult bit, really. You have to start forgetting it as an individual story, and start reinventing it as fiction. It's a question of getting it down, trying to write each individual storyline and then trying to bring it all together. The end was very hard to get right – you couldn't have it tied up too clearly, because it'd be false.

The ending – a surprisingly optimistic one given the often bleak subject matter – was inspired and in some ways justified by the characters' real-life counterparts. He very much wanted to have a happy ending because it was based on real people. Each of the three characters did come through it, 'they did it'. For him, the big inspiring thing was despite those dreadful circumstances, the heart-breaking circumstances, they came out as really kind people, and kindness to his mind is such a great virtue. 'And they managed that, they could have come out to be cruel and angry, but they rose above that.' He is genuinely impressed by the people he spoke with, and admiring of the devotion care workers show to their jobs despite the lack of money and status. Hannah, the care worker who sees all three of the main characters at some point throughout the narrative, is also based on a mix of real people.

Writing about 'inspiring' adults made a change from his previous novel, *Nicholas Dane* (2009), which is a modern retelling of *Oliver Twist* in which adults in care homes let down those they're responsible for. The abuse stories there were also based on real-life stories, and the neglect shown by those in power. 'What were they thinking? Were they thinking it'd never happen again?' he asks incredulously. 'It's difficult to imagine how people could do that, connive in having so many kids abused, but they did.' When he writes, it is partly to understand – 'to understand something isn't necessarily to forgive it, but I'm interested in trying to understand, and trying to get the reader to understand.'

The controversial topics can sometimes make for difficult reading, but not necessarily for difficult writing on his part; hearing the initial stories can be upsetting, or speaking about them afterwards. The authenticity and honesty are crucial for his realistic fiction – 'you can't compromise on those things, even if it is uncomfortable'. And he notes that it is often more possible to explore issues in fiction rather than in other media – 'if you got inside the average 14-year-old head, it'd be an 18s classified film. The audience it was intended for wouldn't be able to go see it in the cinema.'

His focus is on giving characters, including the ones grounded in reality, a voice, rather than making a difference, even when writing about difficult topics. 'You can make a difference for individuals,' he says, 'and sometimes it causes a bit of a debate in public. The thing about novels is that they get you into people's heads, and there are some heads nobody wants to get into, including abusers and the abused, so it doesn't always make a difference in that sense.' But he remains aware of the individual readers who've been affected by the books, and keeps them in mind if the titles are criticised. And indeed his work is often criticised. *Doing It* (2003), for example, was described by the then Children's Laureate in England, Anne Fine, as a 'grubby book' and a kind of 'sexual bullying'. Burgess notes that when he does these realistic things, people sometimes feel as though it's got to be completely rounded. 'They stop having an opinion about the book, and start having an opinion about the opinions expressed in the book, as if it's a report.'



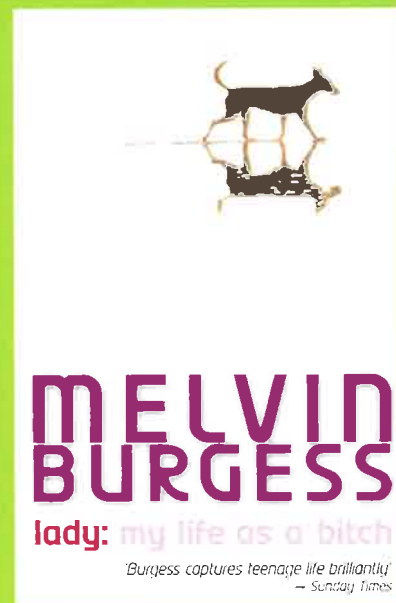
Nicholas Dane

Melvin Burgess

Puffin, 2010

Paperback, 416pp

ISBN 9780141316338



Lady: My Life as a Bitch

Melvin Burgess

Puffin, 2003

Paperback, 208pp

ISBN 9780141310286



Junk
Melvin Burgess

Penguin Classic, 2003
Paperback, 400pp
ISBN 9780141315935

‘If you got inside the average 14-year-old head, it’d be an 18s classified film. The audience it was intended for wouldn’t be able to go see it in the cinema.’

Burgess does see it as less of an issue today, except with child abuse. He notes that it would be very difficult for anyone else to do *Nicholas Dane*, ‘no one else would have got it published’. Undeniably, Burgess has benefitted from being an established author as well as the explosion of the young adult market. When his first book, *The Cry of the Wolf*, was published in 1990, it was called ‘teenage fiction’ but really read by older children. *Junk* is one of the titles credited with turning teenage fiction into something recognised as being for actual teenagers. ‘It’s grown such a lot now, young adult stuff.’ He is quite interested in what’s happening, although he admits he has no interest in following the trends. No sparkly vampires for him, then? ‘Well, there’s a vampire in one of the things I’m working on, but it’s not one of them vampires, not someone you’d want to kiss, really.’ He has just finished a horror novel and has begun interviewing people about their university experiences, intending to write a campus novel. ‘Adolescence goes on a lot longer than people think it does,’ he observes. So the project may turn out as either a young adult or an adult novel. There is also a Philip K Dick style thriller in the works.

Despite having been published for twenty years, he feels that the writing gets harder rather than easier. ‘You end up with more options, more ways of dealing with things, so there are more opportunities to go wrong.’ He has tried to be open to feedback throughout his career, and particularly praises his partner Anita, a producer and script consultant, for her input into *Kill All Enemies*. (‘She’s brilliant. And ruthless.’) But, he admits with a grin, ‘you always hope it’s a work of unparalleled genius which needs no work...’ **CH**

Claire Hennessy is the author of nine novels for young adults, published by Poolbeg, and is currently working on her next book. She recently completed a master’s degree in popular literature, and regularly teaches creative writing workshops in Dublin and for festivals throughout the country. She likes tea. A lot.



DIGITAL STORYTELLING AND ELECTRONIC BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Image © Moonbot Studios L.A. LLC

Holly Willis



In this feature, Holly Willis discusses the impact of the emergence of digital literacy and electronic publishing on the international children's book world.

Last October, a short video posted to YouTube showing a 1-year-old girl trying to read a magazine the way one would read text on an iPad – scrolling, tapping, and expanding the image – went viral, with more than three million hits to date. Why? Because it pinpoints the anxiety surrounding reading in a digital culture as children's first experiences with reading take place increasingly on and through various electronic devices rather than with printed pages. For many, the viral video serves as evidence of the fundamental shift taking place with regard to reading, and much of the commentary surrounding the video centres on a sense of loss: this child will never know a world without digital tools.

This may be true. But this child *will* know a world in which reading becomes a far more varied experience, with multiple devices available to support reading, and a host of new kinds of reading experiences that are by turns playful, instructive, interactive, and even collaborative. Indeed, a long list of developers is creating interactive books for iPads and mobile devices, and many of these are very compelling, imagining a hybrid form somewhere between the book and the moving image. Some of these projects are also gradually expanding beyond the book and page metaphor that has so stubbornly constrained the design of many children's e-books to date, and finding new ways to intrigue and excite young readers.

This new generation of digital books follows more than 25 years of experiments in electronic literature – of networked fiction, interactive fiction, hypertext, locative stories, generative poetry, and playable media – and an attendant body of rich scholarly work devoted to interpreting it. It also comes after a similarly lengthy and complex history of electronic literature for children as authors and designers, as well as children's publishers and game developers, have worked to create media-rich reading experiences for children, whether through CD-ROMs, websites, or various interactive games.

In addition, it also builds on the fact that children routinely experience stories across multiple platforms – stories centred on Thomas the Tank Engine, for example, may be viewed on television, via DVD on various players, online, or as books. The stories travel from one media platform to another, and many children experience the stories across these disparate devices rather seamlessly. Add to these experiences something as prosaic as audiobooks or even books augmented with audio features, and it is clear that multimedia reading is nothing new.

One might also look to various television shows that focus on early literacy, such as *Sesame Street*, *Super Why!* and *WordWorld*. In these cases, the distinction between word and image increasingly begins to dissolve, and children experience an integrated mix of words and pictures; kinetic and screen-based text is at once read by a viewer and viewed by a reader in a dynamic flux of interpretation.

Scholars working on electronic literature have argued from the mid-1990s onwards that educators and parents need to be attentive to electronic literature for children. Contemporary digital media is affecting storytelling itself; it is impacting the ways in which we tell, design, interpret, and retell stories, and rather than simply observing a dichotomy between the digital text and the physical book, we need a far more nuanced understanding, and even a language, for discussing electronic texts. Further, children often are quite adept at interpreting the visual attributes of electronic storytelling, and we should work to support and extend their expertise as best we can.

‘Kinetic and screen-based text is at once read by a viewer and viewed by a reader in a dynamic flux of interpretation.’

Contemporary digital stories

While there exists a 25-year history of electronic publishing, as well as a history of scholarship devoted to e-texts, interest in electronic literature for children has exploded in the last four or five years due primarily to the proliferation of tablets and e-book reading devices, as well as the popularity of Apple's iPhone and iPad. The 2010 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas seemed to inaugurate a new generation of mobile devices, showcasing an abundance of tablets and networked reading tools, and today it is estimated that more than 1.2 billion new mobile devices are produced each year. The proliferation is attributed in part to new low-power and low-cost processors that are robust enough to support networked activities, but the result, in addition to the astonishing rate of growth, is an equally thrilling moment of innovation.

One of the places for this innovation is in e-books for children. At this point, there are five main categories of e-books for this audience. First, there are those e-books that remake existing books, adding some interactive functionality and audio to books that may be well known already. These reissues fall along a broad spectrum, from those that remain essentially book-like, with minor changes afforded by the technology of the electronic device, to those that substantially reimagine the text through the incorporation of graphics, text, and interactivity. Then there are original e-books which are born-digital, meaning that they do not have a physical predecessor; these too fall along a spectrum, from those that remediate the book to those that go all out and try to reimagine storytelling through the digital. Then there are projects that are more like TV shows or short



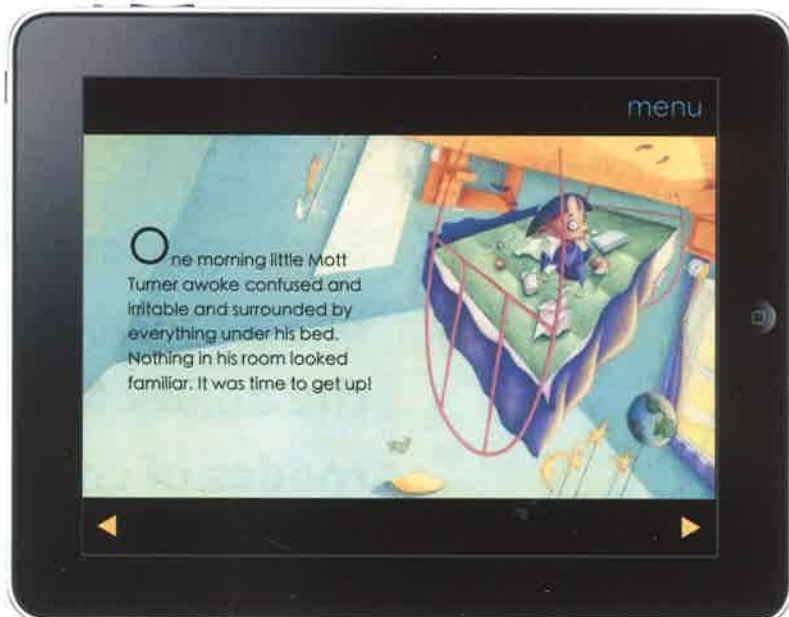
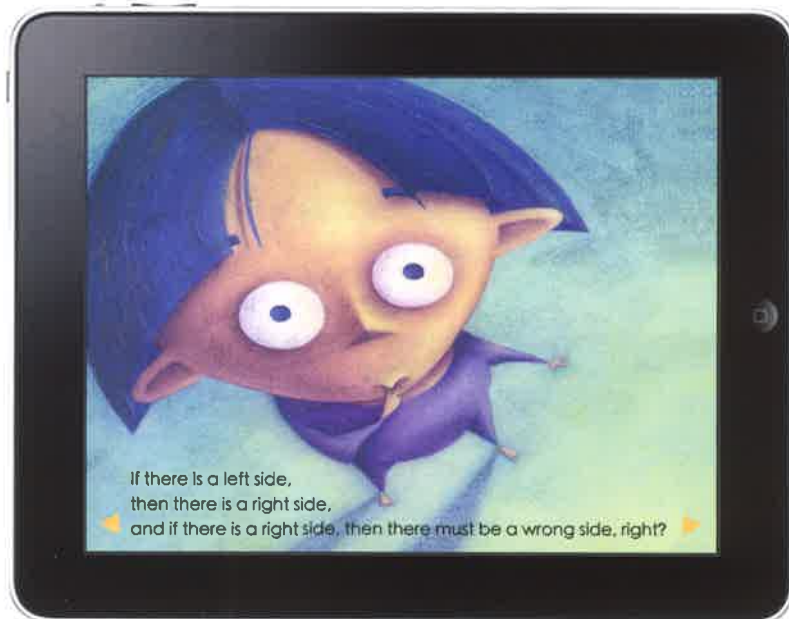
films, with the act of reading being an additional activity, or intentionally emphasised to encourage early literacy. *Super Why!* for the iPhone or iPad would embody this model. A fourth genre is the book that becomes a game, moving readers through the story by placing challenges or puzzles in the path of forward movement. Finally, there are projects that emerge more from the world of film, with a rich visual sensibility and sense of movement, but which also include exciting reading experiences. These are akin to movies that ask you to read.

Digital remakes

Alice for the iPad, from 2010, remains one of the most celebrated children's e-books in the current generation of digital stories. Developed by the London-based company Atomic Antelope and featuring the glorious illustrations of John Tenniel from the 1865 edition of the book by Lewis Carroll, *Alice for the iPad* maintains the general idea of the book with pages, but the interactivity is wonderfully playful and unpredictable, in keeping with the magic of the story. Users can manipulate various objects throughout the book by touching and swiping, and play with gravity by tilting the device upside down. The reading experience remains central – there is plenty to read, to be sure, and the developers paid close attention to typographic design as well – but the experience of reading overall is transformed by the very specific qualities of the iPad, including its glossy surface – which seems to make the images themselves shimmer – and its response to gravity.

One of the loveliest children's e-books in the remake genre is *PopOut! The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, by the Vancouver-based company Loud Crow Interactive. Launched in October 2010, the book reimagines the classic Beatrix Potter story with an elegant interface appropriate to the design of the original text. The lovely illustrations feature small 'tabs' like those in pop-up books or with paper dolls; these handles allow a reader to move things on the page – you can help Peter slide under the fence as he scurries away from Mr McGregor, for example. You are also able to point or tap to cause other small movements, or to hear sound effects. These attributes offer a subtle and not overpowering enhancement of the book's design, creating a delicate and intriguing experience. With regard to reading, the book features a narrator who reads each page, or the option to read alone without the audio. Tapping a particular word makes it audible in case a reader needs some assistance. Overall, *PopOut! The Tale of Peter Rabbit* features a gentle enhancement of the original book rather than a radical or explosive media experience. This resemblance to books may account for some of its popularity; the book as a form continues to be the foundation for the reading experience in this case, which may prove reassuring to many.

Dozens of existing books have been republished as electronic books recently, from *Harold and the Purple Crayon* to *The Three Little Pigs*, and from *Pat the Bunny* to *Fancy Nancy*; the ones that will thrive will be those that transform the story in a way that is organic to the story itself, and is neither constrained by the limits of a device, or driven to use each and every feature of the device. *The Wrong Side of the Bed 3D*, written by Wallace E Keller in 1992 and developed by See Here Studios in 2010, is an example of this potential. The story tells of a boy, Mott, who wakes up on the wrong side of the bed. He lives the day in an upside-down world, bouncing to school on the ceiling of the school bus, and then floating haphazardly upward into space when there's nothing to hold him in place. The story is nicely retold with a cinematographic eye. There's a sense of camera movement – the pull-back with Mott as he floats upward, for example, captures the potential of a more cinematic approach to digital storytelling. The book has the option of being viewed in 3D, which seems somewhat gimmicky; the overall charm of this project centres on its simple recognition of the significance of moving images in the new storytelling equation.



The Wrong Side of the Bed 3D

Images © Wallace E Keller and See Here Studios



**The Fantastic Flying Books
of Mr Morris Lessmore**
Images © Moonbot Studios LA, LLC

Playing the story

If moving images are significant in their impact on digital books, so too is the influence of gaming. Many children's books take advantage of familiar gaming devices — overcoming obstacles, solving puzzles, choosing pathways — to create engaging reading experiences. *Nancy Drew Mobile Mysteries: Shadow Ranch*, developed by Her Interactive and launched in February 2011, attempts to truly merge the forms to create something unique. The project adapts the 1930s mystery novel into an interactive game in which players read the novel, and along the way collect various objects that are part of the mystery, solve mini-mysteries and puzzles, and choose from a variety of paths in order to move forward. The project therefore engages readers in a more active form of sleuthing as they join Nancy Drew in the decision-making process.

‘Screen-based reading tends to be multimodal, and requires the ability to parse a variety of modes of communication – visual, acoustic, spatial, interactive.’

Cinematic inspiration

While the previous e-books adapted existing books, some new e-books start from a different source. Perhaps the most celebrated effort in this direction is *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr Morris Lessmore* which adapts an animated 15-minute short – winner of the 2012 Academy Award for Best Animated Short – and transforms the video into a very interactive experience. Developed by Moonbot Studios and launched in May 2011, the e-book has earned numerous awards, including the 'App of the Year' award from *Apps Magazine*. The story follows Morris Lessmore, a lover of books, who devotes his entire life to caring for – and reading – books. He grows older, and when it's time to die, he becomes a book himself in a gentle reflection on the cycles of life and love, and the power of stories.

The story includes wonderful narration, a musical score, and inventive moments of interactivity. At one point, the narrator reads, 'Sometimes Morris would become lost in a book and scarcely emerge for days.' The first half of the sentence also appears on the page, with Morris running atop the letters as the reader slides the sentence across the screen, or scrolls back and forth. If you slide the sentence too far, however, Morris tumbles off the end, and finds himself hanging on to the top of the screen as pages and pages of words slide past him, a tunnel of text, illuminated by a bright light at the end. Ultimately, *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr Morris Lessmore* uses a full range of multimedia attributes to celebrate the life-affirming power of reading. The company recently followed the Fantastic Flying Books project with a new effort titled *The Numberlys*, which borrows its visual style from iconic films such as *Metropolis* and *Flash Gordon*, but is billed as an adventure, a mystery, a game, and a story.

The story opens with images reminiscent of early European cinema, including the graphic precision of bodies seen in Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* from 1938. The world introduced at the beginning is made up of numbers only; the alphabet does not exist, and the result is a world that is highly regimented and 'numberly'. As with the *Fantastic Flying Books*, the visual design of the story is fundamentally cinematic, with dramatic compositions, a rich soundtrack, lots of motion, and a clear editing style that cuts between scenes with the action of the story to screens with text, which is read by a narrator. The story also includes mini-games throughout as the five characters at the centre of the story attempt to create each letter of the alphabet. These in some ways detract from the story proper, but at the same time they encourage identification with the five characters as you interact to help shape each letter. And making some of the letters is incredibly fun. And again, as with the *Fantastic Flying Books*, the story centres thematically on the fundamentals of reading, in this case the alphabet.

Time to rethink screen time

For decades, the relationship between kids and screens has been fraught. Paediatricians have collectively recommended strict limits on 'screen time' and the general feeling has been that watching television or playing computer games is something parents might patiently tolerate but certainly not celebrate. However, the recent explosion of digital devices has prompted some rethinking. Part of this rethinking centres on trying to understand screen-based reading, which many argue is very different from reading from a page. Screen-based reading tends to be multimodal, and requires the ability to parse a variety of modes of communication – visual, acoustic, spatial, interactive.

It's also important to recognise that children are spending more and more time with various devices, and indeed, children – like the 1-year-old who tried to read a paper magazine as if it were on an iPad – are encountering these devices at a very early age. The Joan Ganz Cooney Center has issued a series of reports that chronicle the impact of mobile devices on literacy and learning, including 'Learning: Is There an App for That?', 'Pockets of Potential: Using Mobile Technologies to Promote Children's Learning,' and 'Take a Giant Step: A Blueprint for Teaching Young Children in a Digital Age'. Findings from these reports include the potential for 'anywhere, anytime' learning and the evolution of personalised learning experiences that can connect with other more traditional experiences. The reports also list important goals, including developing better mobile interventions for learners and preparing teachers to integrate these mobile experiences in creative ways in the classroom.

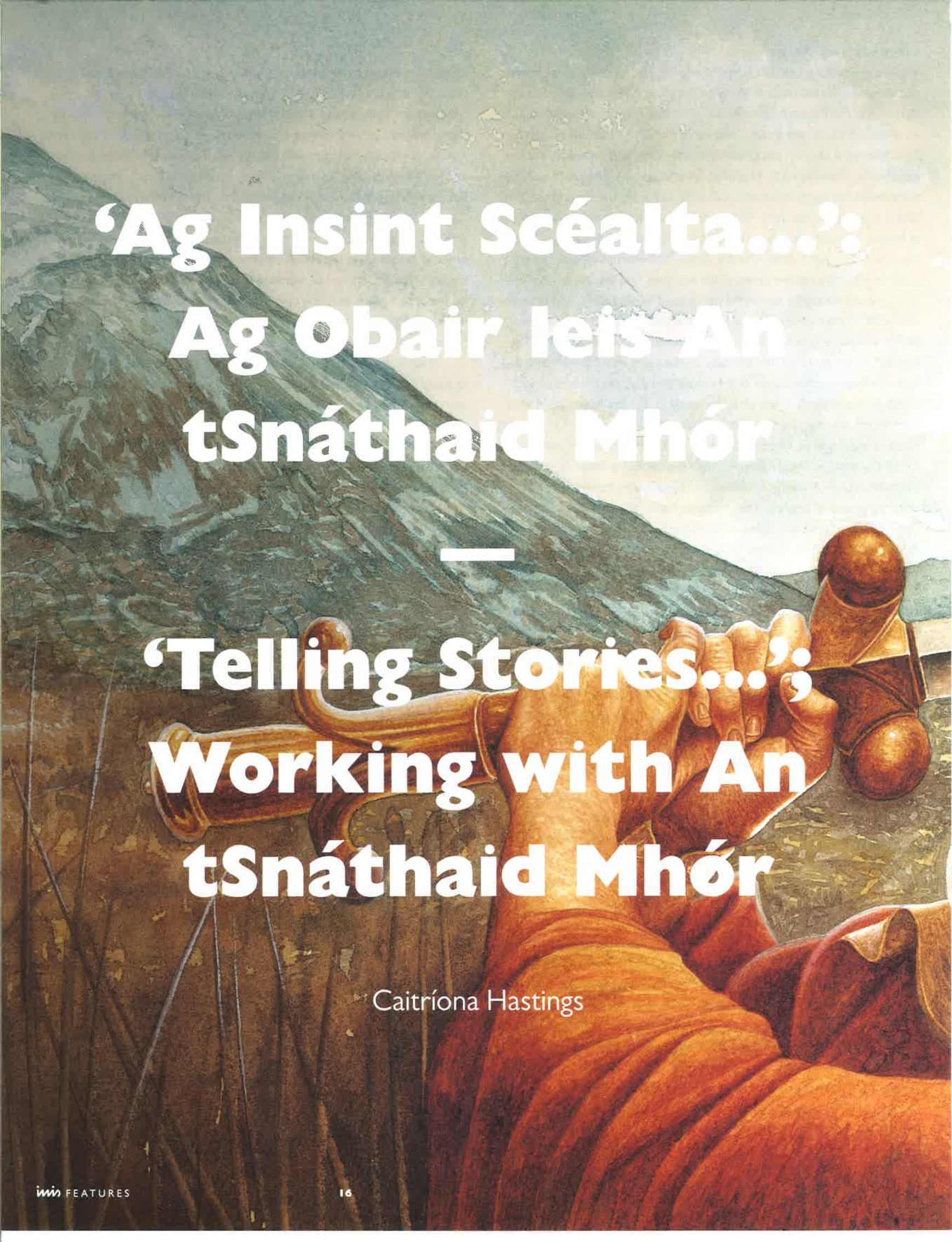
Rather than seeing e-books as a threat to reading 'real' books, or as a spectacularisation of words that somehow undermines traditional storytelling, we might do better to recognise the ways in which e-books might help reinforce some key experiences and traits that we do value. For example, the sense of shared excitement about reading, and add to these traditional values those of multimodal comprehension and, perhaps, eventual media-rich authoring. **HW**



**The Fantastic Flying Books
of Mr Morris Lessmore**

Image © Moonbot Studios LA, LLC

Holly Willis is a research assistant professor in the School of Cinematic Arts, as well as director of academic programmes at the University of Southern California's Institute for Multimedia Literacy. She teaches, organises workshops and oversees academic programmes designed to introduce new media literacy skills across the university's campus and curriculum.



‘Ag Insint Scéalta...’:

**Ag Obair leis An
tSnáthaid Mhór**

**‘Telling Stories...’;
Working with An
tSnáthaid Mhór**

Caitríona Hastings

Déanann Caitriona Hastings agus Andrew Whitson machnamh ar an bpróiseas comhpháirtíochta i gcruthú phictiúrleabhar agus ar an amharcscéalaíocht agus iad ag plé leis an gcomhlacht foilsitheoireachta Gaeilge, An tSnáthaid Mhór.

Caitriona Hastings and Andrew Whitson reflect on their collaborative process of creating picturebooks and visual storytelling with the Irish-language publishing company, An tSnáthaid Mhór.



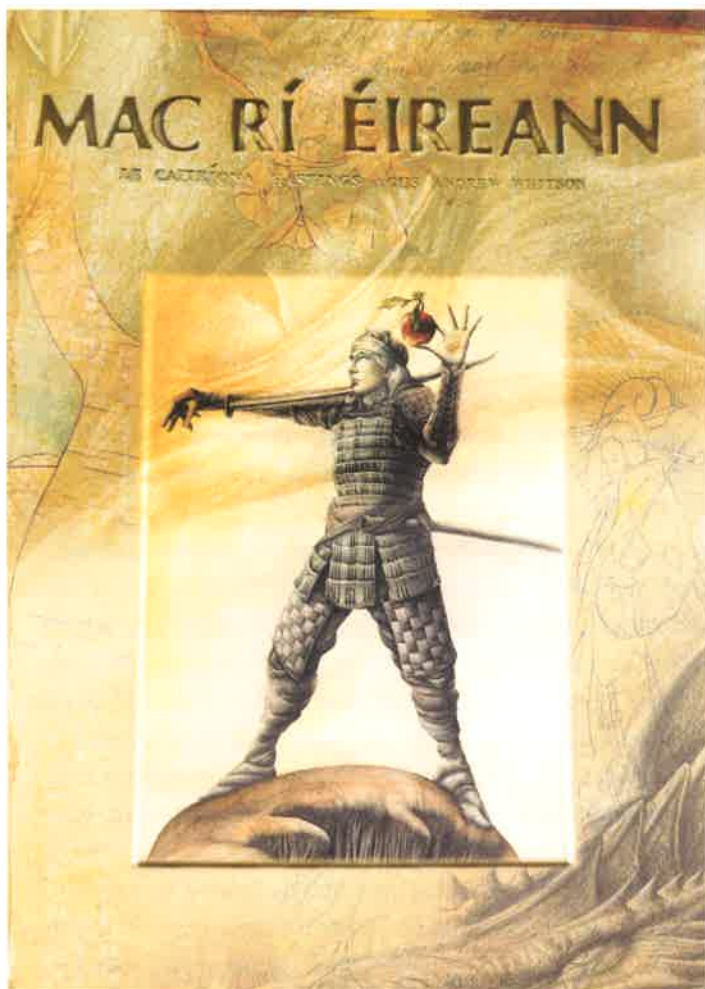
Is le gairid a thosaigh mise ag obair ar leabhair do pháistí. Braithim go bhfuil an t-ádh dearg orm seans a bheith agam bheith ag plé leis an cheird. Tugann sé le chéile Gaeilge agus béaloideas, dhá ní ar chaith mé mo shaol oibre ag plé leo. Ba mhinic a ritheadh sé liom a 'scannánúla' is a bhí na scéalta traidisúnta. Bhínn sa tóir ar ealaíontóir a chabhródh liom iad a chur ar fáil arís i bhfoirm leabhair.

Creidim go bhfuil fiorthábhacht leo mar scéalta. Ta faomhadh na gcéadta bliain taobh thiar díobh, ón am gur chultúr béil is mó a bhí i réim. Is acmhainn againn iad le muid a chur i dteagmháil, ní amháin leis na glúnta a chuaigh romhainn, ach linn féin chomh maith. Cé nach cultúr béil cultúr an ama seo, agus cé nach mbíonn aon oíche airneáil againn níos mó, creidim gur fearrde sinn na seanscéalta bheith againn. Ar mhaithe leis an eolas ata iontu, ar mhaithe leis an ghreann ata iontu, ar mhaithe leis na múnlaí iompair agus mothúcháin atá iontu? Tá siad sa DNA againn cheana. Nár bhocht an scéal bheith dall orthu?

I bhfómhar na bliana 2007, bhí Oireachtas na Samhna ar siúl i gCathair na Mart i gContae Mhaigh Eo. Le linn an Oireachtais, bronnadh Gradam Réics Carló ar Andrew Whitson agus Caitriona Nic Sheáin as a gcéad phictiúrleabhar *Gaiscíoch na Beilte Uaine*. Bhronn siad cóip den leabhar ormsa. Chuir sé gliondar orm: an téacs álainn, na híomhánna, an dlúthdhiosca i gcúl an leabhair, an pacáiste ar fad curtha le chéile ar mhodh an-tarraingteach. An rud is mó a chuaigh i bhfeidhm orm ná an dóigh ar éirigh leo an seanscéal a athinsint i bhfoirm úr a bhí go hiomlán nua-aimsearta, agus a bhí dílis do bhunbhrí chultúrtha an scéil san am chéanna. Thiocfadh dó gur seo díreach an rud a raibh mé féin sa tóir air le fada!

Tosaigh muid ag caint le chéile ansin, ag malartú smaointe. Ar mhaithe liomsa obair leo ar thionscadal éigin? Bhí sceitimíni orm. Le fírinne, idir sceitimíni agus fhaitíos a bhí orm agus muid ag tabhairt faoinár gcéad phictiúrleabhar le chéile, leagan nua-aoiseach de mhiotas-scéal Bhaloir.

An chéad rud a bhí le foghlaim agam ná cad is pictiúrleabhar ann. Go teoiriciúil, i gcás an phictiúrleabhair, bítear ag úsáid focal agus íomhánna chun an scéal a insint. Is páirt den insint an dá chuid, na pictiúir chomh tábhachtach leis na focail chun an scéal a réaladh. Cineál d'fhás orgánach ba chóir bheith ann. Má bhíonn scríbhneoir agus maisitheoir ann, bíonn an bheirt ag insint an scéil ina ndóigh agus ina meán féin. Teastaíonn muinín agus meas agus comhthuiscint eatarthu. Dá ndéarfainn é, easpa ego atá ag teastáil – go mbeidís beirt ag obair as lámh a chéile ar mhaithe leis an leabhar a bheas ann sa deireadh – mar is scéalaithe nua-aimseartha iad beirt. Saghas *comhscéil* atá sa phictiúrleabhar. Ní raibh sé i bhfad gur fhoghlaim mé gan bheith róshealbhach maidir le mo chuid focal. Cé go mb'álainn iad, b'éigean scaoileadh le roinnt acu go minic, chun spás a dhéanamh, ar mhaithe leis an saothar deiridh.



**‘Spreagann
cruthaitheacht
gach duine
an duine eile.
Is pobal sinn.’**

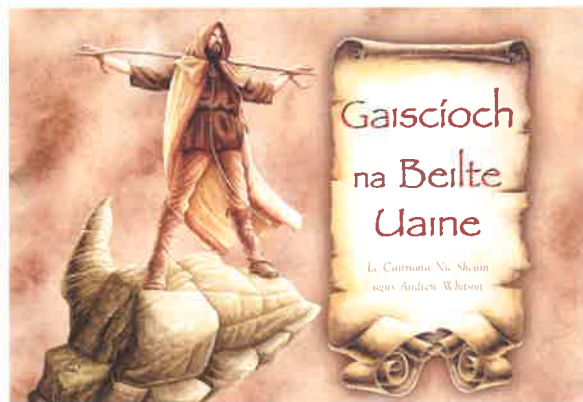
Mac Rí Éireann

Caitriona Hastings
agus Andrew Whitson

An tSnáthaid Mhór, 2010
Clúdach crua, 64pp
ISBN 9780955227141

Bhí nithe eile le foghlaim fosta. Príomh-riail an bhéaloideasáí gan aon athrú a dhéanamh ar théacs scéil. Ní ceadmhach cur leis nó baint de. Ní ceadmhach a 'cheartú' nó a 'fheabhsú'. Ach sa chás seo, b'éigean taighde a dhéanamh ar neart leaganacha de scéal áirithe chun leagan úr a fhí as na míreanna is fóirsteanaí agus is taitneamhaí astu. I dtaca le scéal Bhaloir de, ní téacsanna béil amháin a bhí le scrúdú ach seanábhar ó na lámhscríbhinní chomh maith. Ní ionann pictiúrleabhar agus iris acadúil. I gcás an phictiúrleabhair, d'fhéadfadh an téacs bheith inathraithe suas go dtí an bomaite deiridh, ag brath ar shamhlaíocht agus ar riachtanais an mhaisitheora. Thóg sé tamall orm teacht isteach ar an nóiseán, sin ach tuigim go maith anois é. Ní obair acadúil aonarach í seo, ach comhoibriú beirte, agus is iomaí buntáiste a bhaineann leis sin.

Is fada suim agam sa leagan Gaeilge den mhiotas clasaiceach fán laoch a mharaíonn ollphéist chun cailín óg a shábháil. Rith sé le Andy gur sheift mhaith a bheadh ann an scéal a insint i bhfoirm dialainne, ligean don phríomhcharachtar a scéal féin a insint síos tríd an phictiúrleabhar. Bhí an-chuid féidearthachtaí íomhánna agus dearaidh ag baint leis an smaoineamh sin. Is sa tríú pearsa a insítear na scéalta in éigse béil de ghnáth. Ach is ag ullmhú leabhair a bhí muidinne. Níor mhór an t-ábhar a chur in oiriúint don mheán nua sin. D'éirigh go han-mhaith leis mar choincheap. Tá mé an-bhródúil as *Mac Rí Éireann* anois. Dar liom is tarraingtí i bhfad laoch an scéil agus é ag insint a scéil féin. Is práinní an scéal é agus ar an ábhar sin is mó suim an léitheora ann.



Gaiscíoch na Beilte Uaine

Caitriona Nic Sheáin
agus Andrew Whitson

An tSnáthaid Mhór, 2006
Cruachlúdach, 64pp
ISBN 9780955227103

D'aithin mé rud eile. Is i bhfoirm íomhánna a bhíonn an t-ealaíontóir ag smaoinamh. Bíim féin tógtha le focail ar ndóigh. Agus muid ag obair ar phictiúrleabhar, b'fhéidir nach mbíonn gá leis an oiread sin focal. In amanna, is fusa gné éigin de scéal a léirú le hiomhá. Amanna eile, is úsáidí na focail. Cuirim an-suim sa taobh sin den ghnó anois – mar a bheadh samhlaíocht na beirte ag ceol le chéile chun siomfóin a dhéanamh. Nuair a éiríonn leis mar fhiontar, bíonn toradh iontach air. Agus bíim féin ag cuimhneamh ar thoise na súl níos minice anois agus mé i mbun pinn. An-suimiúil ar fad!

De ghnáth, obair uaigneach aonarach obair an scríbhneora. Gan aige nó aici ach é nó í féin, an peann nó an ríomhaire. Ach bíonn foireann daoine ag obair le chéile i dtioncadail na Snáthaide Móire. Cuid mhór daoine ag plé leis na céimeanna éagsúla i bhforbairt an leabhair ón bhuntéacs ar aghaidh: Andy a dhéanann na léaráidí, na mainicíní a sheasann dó, na dreamanna a chuireann cultacha ar fáil, na dearthóirí, na clódóirí, an mhuintir a léann an scéal ar an dlúthdhiosca, an mhuintir a dhéanann beochan ar an scéal, na heagarthóirí, lucht léite profaí, fiú lucht déanta tae (!), chun gan ach cuid acu a lua. Bíonn aithne agam ar na daoine sin go léir. Braithim an dúthracht chéanna i ngach duine acu is atá ionam féin chun an leabhar a dhéanamh chomh maith is a thig linn. Tuigim go maith gur pribhléid é bheith ag obair ar an dóigh seo. Spreagann cruthaitheacht gach duine an duine eile. Is pobal sinn.

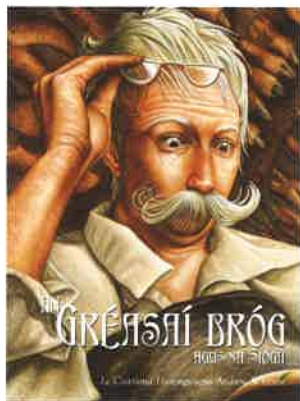
Ar cheann de na nithe is mó a fhaighim ó bheith ag obair leis an tSnáthaid Mhór tá misneach tabhairt faoi. Ní chaitear aon am ar bith ar imní mar gheall ar cad nach féidir a dhéanamh, ar staid na Gaeilge/Gaeltachta/tíre srl. Ní dhéantar aon am a dhiomailt ar éadóchas i dtaca le todhchaí na teanga agus mar sin de. Mar scríbhneoir Gaeilge, is mór an faoiseamh é sin domsa. Níl muid dall ar na cúinsí sochttheangaíochta ina bhfuil muid ag obair. Ach seachas ligean dó sin beaguchtach a chur orainn, treabhann muid linn ag iarraidh rud éigin álainn a chruthú.

Feictear dom go bhfuil bunchreideamh taobh thiar de gach rud a dhéanann an tSnáthaid Mhór. Baineann sin ar dhóigh amháin nó ar dhóigh eile le coincheap an phobail. Glactar leis go bhfuil a leithéid de rud agus pobal-Gaeilge ann. Glactar leis go bhfuil riachtanais samhlaíochta agus ealaíne ag an phobal sin, ar nós aon phobail eile. Glactar leis go bhfuil ceart ag na leanaí ar na nithe atá de dhlúth agus d'inneach a gcuid oidhreacht, faoi chrut nua-aoiseach a fhreagraíonn dá gcuid taithí féin ar an saol. Glactar leis go gceannóidh a gcuid tuismitheoirí na leabhair a dhéanann muid, má dhéanann muid maith go leor iad, agus más féidir leo teacht orthu.

Is cúis áthais dom bheith ag obair leis an tSnáthaid Mhór. Níl aon teorainn leis an méid is féidir a bhaint amach, ach cur chuige mar is ceart. Tá instinn sa duine bheith ag insint agus ag éisteacht le scéalta. Cé go mairimid i ré na teicneolaíoch anois, is léir go bhfuil an tóir chéanna againn ar an scéalaíocht: sna scannáin, sna cluichí ríomhaireachta, sna sobaldrámaí. Is ainmhithe sinn atá beo ar scéalta. Is cuma cá bhfaighimid iad: cois tine, i leabhair, ar DVDanna, nó ar an apa a bheas ag teacht amach le *Ó Chránn go Crann*, an leabhar is úire ó An tSnáthaid Mhór.

Bíonn cultúr folláin in ann é féin a chur in oiriúint don am i láthair. Dar liom, is páirt den éabhlóid sin mo chuid oibre leis an tSnáthaid Mhór. Mar a deireadh an scéalaí agus é ag míniú fíos fátha a scéil: 'Bhí sin ann i bhfad ó shin agus is fada ó bhí. Dá mbeinn ann an uair sin, ní bheinn ann anois. Dall ní fheicfinn é. Bodhar ní chluinfinn é. Balbh ní chanfainn é...'

Ar nós an té a théann ag dreapadh ar na sléibhte as siocair iad bheith ann, níl an dara rogha againn ach leanúint orainn, ag insint scéalta. **CH**



An Gréasaí Bróg

agus na Síoga

Caitríona Hastings
agus Andrew Whitson

An tSnáthaid Mhór, 2009

Cruachlúdach, 32pp

ISBN 9780955227127



Ó Chránn go Crann

Caitríona Hastings
agus Andrew Whitson

An tSnáthaid Mhór, 2011

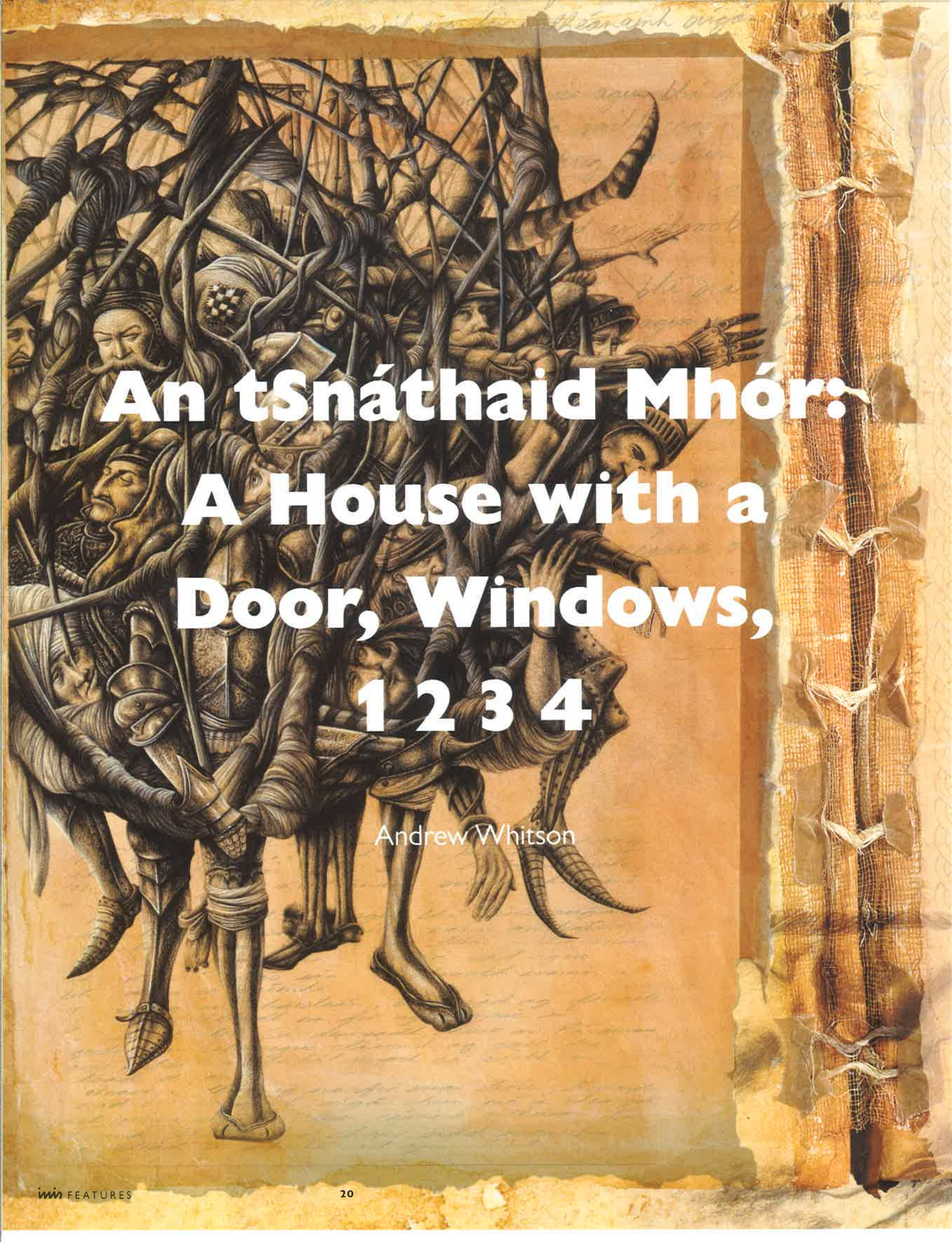
Cruachlúdach, 52pp

ISBN 9780955227158

As Tir Eoghain do Chaitríona

Hastings. Ina leachtóir le Gaeilge agus Béaloideas in Ollscoil Uladh agus in Institiúid Teicneolaíochta na Gaillimhe-Mhaigh Eo go dtí 2010 nuair a d'éirigh sí as an obair. Roinnt leabhar do pháistí curtha amach aici: *Dea-Scéala* (1998), *Balor* (2009), *An Gréasaí Bróg* agus na *Síoga* (2009), *Mac Rí Éireann* (2010) agus *Ó Chránn go Crann* (2011).

Caitríona Hastings was born in County Tyrone. She lectured in Irish and folklore in the University of Ulster and in Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology before retiring in 2010. She has written a number of books for children: *Dea-Scéala* (1998), *Balor* (2009), *An Gréasaí Bróg* agus na *Síoga* (2009), *Mac Rí Éireann* (2010) and *Ó Chránn go Crann* (2011).



An tSnáthaid Mhór: A House with a Door, Windows, 1 2 3 4

Andrew Whitson

As I gaze through the arched window of my house, I look up at Napoleon's Nose, the dominant feature of Belfast's Cavehill. Here, the United Irishmen Henry Joy McCracken and Theobald Wolfe Tone met in 1795 and swore an oath to launch the 1798 rebellion. This window allows light to enter the loft where books are illustrated and designed.

As I gaze through the square window, I look down upon the great yellow Samson and Goliath gantry cranes that dominate Belfast's Harland and Wolff docks. Here, the ill-fated luxury liner *Titanic* was constructed in 1912. This window allows light to enter the big room where meetings are held and plans are made.

As I gaze through the round window, I know that one mile to my right is the Art Department of St Malachy's College, where I completed my teaching practice and PJ Lynch attended as a student. Three doors to my left I can see the house where Oliver Jeffers grew up. This window allows light to enter the room where books are delivered from the printer, stored and (for the most part) distributed through Dublin one hundred miles to the south.

As I gaze at my computer, I can see the world. This window helps us to grow. Welcome to An tSnáthaid Mhór, an Irish publishing house for children where evolution rather than revolution is its mantra. Humility rather than pride its sea shanty. Respect rather than envy its narrative and success rather than failure its desire.

The words from the Talking Head's 1980 song *Once in a Lifetime* often reverberate in my head with their mass being proportionate to the ever-increasing demands of An tSnáthaid Mhór. 'You may ask yourself, well how did I get here?' I still cannot attest to being an expert in anything whatsoever, never mind the publishing industry in Ireland or anywhere else. So it is with humility that I write this article about how An tSnáthaid Mhór has been moulded through its early experiences and how these are helping to inform its future practice. 'Organic' is probably the best word to describe the birth and development of An tSnáthaid Mhór. There was never a great master plan for world dominance; instead the company was born out of necessity. Between 1995 and 2001, I was teaching in a special needs school. I was also illustrating a number of books for Appletree Press in Belfast and Cassell in London with what I felt were second-rate results. Therefore, I decided to apply the brakes to my uninspired artistic endeavours and search out a publishing path that would stimulate and excite.

My quest soon led me to the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin where I quickly felt as though I had discovered the lost city of Atlantis. I immersed myself in the formally hidden world of forgotten Irish tales and sagas sourced through catalogues that listed numbered motifs of every description. Motifs such as 'The Dragon Slayer' and 'The Heart in the Egg', to which the department staff guided me. It was a matter of hours before I found myself clutching a copy of an obscure tale recorded at a kitchen table in County Clare in the 1920s. The Irish was disjointed and not suitable for a young modern reader but its contents, although long and complex, made for an exciting discovery synonymous with a bygone age of Irish storytelling.

Gaiscíoch na Beilte Uaine became our first publication and our initial desire to mould it into such was the catalyst that gave birth to An tSnáthaid Mhór. My wife Caitríona was raised with Irish as a first language and taught through Irish in a school established in part by her parents. She therefore began to restructure the story for the modern reader while I set about illustrating the text in its raw state. This was a complete departure in practice for an illustrator who had always been given completed texts in advance with strict guidelines regarding layouts and illustration dimensions. When I look back on it now, words like 'loose cannon' and 'bonkers' come to mind. However, the excitement we felt exploring this new frontier did unleash a creative and often frightening style of working within the company, which although now is slightly more refined, still beats at the heart of every project we embark upon.

Illustrations were completed with reckless abandon with little regard for the format or layout of the project. Holidays to Tunisia doubled as research trips where North African buildings informed the backgrounds

for the images in the book. Friends and relatives were drafted in to pose in strange costumes, while a professional photographer filmed them doing all kinds of silly things, such as hanging from stairs or galloping on horseback when they had never been on a horse before. Neighbours began ignoring us for fear that we belonged to a strange and obscure cult. The goodwill that was offered freely at these times was a major reflection of how we wanted to work. We had both grown up with people who tended to buck the trend, who tended to establish schools and newspapers against apparently insurmountable odds, people who had strong convictions and stood up for what they believed in; they were the Irish-speaking community of the Shaw's Road in Belfast. In a sense we were tapping into

a rich mine of people who one generation earlier had been inspired and who now recognised the same thing in us and were all too willing to put a wind at our backs.

Midway through the project we began to wonder how we were going to finance it. Crazy I know but that's just how it was, no logic or development plans just raw passion. We managed to set up meetings with various people in both Belfast and Dublin showing them our work. Fortunately for us they helped to secure funding not only to produce the book but to also press an audio disc to accompany it. To access the money, we had to set up a viable Memorandum and Articles of Association and so we became An tSnáthaid Mhór Teoranta. The English equivalent of this would read Dragonfly Press Ltd; however, the direct translation means The Big Needle, a poetic way of describing the dragonfly.

Now that the money was in place we then hired the services of a professional designer who fortunately for us was my wife's cousin. Without his patience and tolerance in the early days we would not have completed the project. I can remember clearly the first day walking into his office with a bunch of illustrations under my arm and asking him to bring his best design skills to the table. This is where things really began to get tied together. After months of toing and froing and countless changes to both

**'When I look
back on it now,
words like loose
cannon and
bonkers come
to mind.'**

text and layouts, the book was ready to go to print. This was a very exciting time. We decided to use a local printer located just 10 miles from our house and which once owned Blackstaff Press in Belfast. This proved to be a wise choice as halfway through the first run I had to shout 'Stop the press!' The plates had not been properly set up and the colours not calibrated. If I had not been there with the designer that night, two years of work would have been severely compromised.

Two weeks after that almost disastrous print run, boxes of books arrived at our house and within six months we had to print a second edition. Ever since that first experience with the printer I always book a print pass to be on the presses through the printing of a new project. Sometimes this can take up to 15 hours, but I have not been able to come up with a viable alternative. Although we still prefer to keep everything fluid until the last possible minute before layouts go to the printers, it would be unfair to suggest that we do not have a better knowledge of what we are doing compared to that first project. Each project since has brought its own experiences from which we have gained invaluable knowledge, and we have been in no hurry to publish more than one title per year as we feel we are still learning our craft.

Since 2007, An tSnáthaid Mhór has published five titles, the last four of which with the acclaimed author Caitríona Hastings. Her latest title, *Ó Chrann go Crann*, has proved especially significant not only as it is a newly written text rather than a retelling of an existing tale, but it is also our first foray into the world of book apps, which we released in March. This latest project has brought with it many new challenges and also an awareness of the changes that are taking place in the world of publishing in general. With the relentless march of technology it would appear that books are no longer considered in only one format but several, from traditional hardcopy to audio, e-books and book apps.



Image © Andrew Whitson

‘Organic is probably the best word to describe the birth and development of An tSnáthaid Mhór.’



Now as we are moving through 2012, An tSnáthaid Mhór has been re-evaluating its practice. Although the traditional hardcopy book is at the core of our passion, the emerging formats are proving significant in influencing our planning. Whereas in the not-too-distant past we thought in terms of page numbers, paper quality, costing of production, dust jacket or matt laminate finishing, DVD and its content, now if we wish to publish in these new formats we need to also consider Apple or Android, tablet or phone proportions, pinch or swipe, tap or shake, and so on. These new considerations are proving extremely relevant as they have a major influence on the planning of a new project.

The challenge for An tSnáthaid Mhór now is to balance all of these considerations when approaching a new project without letting them dominate to the point where creativity and spontaneity are eliminated. **AW**



Image © Andrew Whitson

Andrew Whitson is the director of the publishing company, An tSnáthaid Mhór. He received a degree in design from the University of Ulster at Belfast specialising in illustration. His latest title, co-created with Caitriona Hastings, is the picturebook *Ó Chrann go Crann*.

Siobhán Parkinson, Laureate na nÓg, and
former President of Ireland Mary McAleese



Siobhán Parkinson, *Laureate na nÓg*

Siobhán Parkinson looks back over her two-year term as the inaugural Laureate na nÓg and reflects on her experiences of acting in this advocacy role for the importance of reading, libraries and children's literature.

Siobhán Parkinson, Laureate na nÓg (middle), and Johan Unenge, Swedish Reading Ambassador (right)

Bhuail mé le déanaí le Laureate na nÓg na Stáit Aontithe (iar-laureate í faoin am seo), Katherine Paterson (*Bridge to Terabithia*), ina tigh galánta compórdach adhmaid ar lá aoibheann sneachtúil i mBarre, Vermont. Ach amháin nach nglaothar ‘laureate’ ar chor ar bith ar na laureates a bhíonn acu thall; is é ‘Reading Ambassador’ an teideal a mbíonn in úsáid acu i Mericeá. Chuir sí ceist orm, cén brí a bhaineann leis an focal ‘laureate’ s’againne in Éirinn. Mhínigh mé léi gurb é an t-aon rud nach ndéanann an laureate ná a scith a ligint – GAN a bheith *resting on her laurels*, mar a deirtear. (Faigheann tú roinnt *laurels* ceart go leor, ach níl iontu ach *laurels* maisiúile, agus níl trácht ar do scith a ligint orthu!)

Encouraging children to read is the clear mission of the US Children’s Reading Ambassador, and also (as I discovered when I met him in Gothenburg) of the newly appointed Swedish Reading Ambassador, Johan Unenge. This mission is of course at the heart of the work of our Children’s Laureate project in Ireland too. But it would be neither accurate nor fair to think of this as primarily the work of whoever happens to be laureate: this work of encouragement and enthusiasm-stirring is carried out up and down the country, week in week out, by pretty well all writers for children. What the laureate is best placed to do in this regard is to encourage and acknowledge this fine work in schools and libraries and at festivals; and so, my colleagues and friends in the children’s writers’ community, I salute you: *bail ó Dhia ar an obair*. This is rewarding and important work, but it is tough work too, so hats off to all concerned.

Le linn dom bheith i mo Laureate na nÓg, tá mé ag leanúint ar aghaidh leis an obair sin, ag tabhairt tacaíochta don chlár spreagadh-chunléitheorachta a bhíonn ar siúil in achan scoil agus leabharlann ar fud na tíre. Ní féidir le éinne, áfach – is cuma laureate nó ‘gnáth’ scríbhneoir – cuairt a thabhairt ar gach scoil, leabharlann agus féile leabhar a chuireann cuireadh roimpi, agus mar sin de, ‘sé mo bharúil gur fearr don laureate gan fiú iarracht a dhéanamh bheith uileláithreach. Dar liom féin, ‘sé an buntáiste

‘As reading habits change,
we need to find new ways
of reaching readers.’



is mó atá agam mar laureate ná an seans a bheith agam labhairt ó ardán náisiúnta, agus mar sin, bainim feidhm as achan seans a shíntear chugam labhairt le lucht éisteanna seachas páistí scoile (gan dearmad a dhéanamh ar bheith ag caint le páistí fosta, ar ndóigh).

Wherever I go as laureate and whomever I meet, I find that there is an anxiety in the world about a perceived (and perhaps a real) fall-off in children’s reading, and an apprehension about the effects of new technologies and media on children’s reading habits. My own sense is that children who read voraciously still exist (bless them). I am a little sceptical, however, about the idea that children used to read more voraciously in the past. There have always been avid readers, but these were and continue to be a minority. New media are doubtless having an enormous effect on how people (adults as well as children) read and interact with language and stories, but I see these developments as an exciting opportunity rather than a threat to the reading culture. Children who are constantly texting and using social media are probably reading and writing *more* than the previous generation of children ever did. As reading habits change, we need to find new ways of reaching readers. Ach is dúshlán iontach dúinn an méid seo, in ionad mí-ádh tubaisteach.

Is é sna scoileanna a mbíonn na páistí, ar ndóigh, agus is iontach an obair a bhíonn ar siúil sna scoileanna maidir le spreagadh-chunléitheorachta. But I am wary, all the same, of identifying children’s literature too closely with the educational system. As long as children’s books are thought of essentially as a kind of educational tool, so long will children’s literature be marginalised and undervalued – and that does no service either to children or to literature.

Siobhán Parkinson, Laureate na nÓg and Johan Unenge, Swedish Reading Ambassador with young readers from the Gothenburg Library



I have tended to concentrate my energies as laureate on events that allow me to reach people who might not normally form part of the audience for children's literature. Addressing a gathering at a summer school, for example, allows Laureate na nÓg to bring children's literature to a wider audience and to make it part of 'the national conversation' about literature. Raising the profile and the status of children's literature will have beneficial effects not only for children but also for publishers and booksellers, for writers/illustrators and educators – in short, for the whole children's books world.

Poor levels of literacy are a real source of concern, but these are correlated with poverty and lack of opportunity. This is an economic, social and educational issue that needs serious, tailored professional intervention, and it is not really amenable to mitigation by laureates (nó scríbhneoirí eile ach oiread). Is féidir le cuairt scoile ó scríbhneoir neart spreagadh a thabhairt do pháistí maidir le léitheoracht; but it is, sadly, very unlikely to raise literacy rates among children who have real reading difficulties.

What a laureate *can* do is to raise public awareness about literacy and to make an impassioned plea for those things that actually can make a difference: first, professional intervention for children who have reading difficulties; and secondly – especially for children from homes where reading is not part of normal family activity – well-stocked, well-run, comfortable and

inviting school libraries with a range of books to meet the needs of every child, boys and girls, avid readers and reluctant readers, children who enjoy imaginative literature and children who prefer non-fiction.

It is hard, in times like these, to make a case for what may look like a luxury: school libraries full of good, attractive, up-to-date, enticing books chosen by a professional. There will always be something that looks more urgent, and there will always be a financial argument. But if the Government is serious about addressing poor literacy rates, the single best thing it can do is increase the supply of well-chosen books to schools. Without access to lots of books, thoughtfully chosen and properly mediated by well-informed, encouraging and tactful adults, children simply *cannot* become fluent readers. Money saved by abolishing funding to libraries in primary schools is not a saving at all: it is a debt that we are creating for our children for generations into the future. Money spent on school libraries, on the other hand, is an investment in our cultural and educational achievement, in our country's spiritual, creative and emotional health, and in our economic future as a nation.

Ní mór do scríbhneoirí, mar sin, in éineacht le múinteoirí, leabharlannaí agus tuisimitheoirí, labhairt amach i gconaí, gconaí ar son léitheoirí óga agus ar son leabharlann scoile ach go h-áirithe. 📖📖

Highlights of my term as Laureate na nÓg

- Meeting President McAleese at my inauguration. She met me on the threshold of the Arts Council, asked breezily, 'What's your theme' and when I replied 'Libraries,' she nodded, skipped into the building and proceeded to give a 15-minute speech on the importance of libraries. Some lady!
- Compiling of the Laureate International Library, a small (but growing) and eclectic collection of children's books from many countries, which schools around the country may borrow from Children's Books Ireland. Some of these books are translations, which English-speaking children can read; some are in their original languages, which some of our newcomer children will be able to read; some are in languages that perhaps nobody may be able to read, but which give children a sense of what books in different languages and from different cultures look like; agus tá roinnt beag leabhar as Gaeilge ann chomh maith, cé go bhfuil an béim ar leabhair ó thíortha seachas Éirinn.
- Joint events with UK Children's Laureate, Julia Donaldson, in Dublin and Derry.
- Dublin University Women Graduates Association Christmas lecture 2011 in Trinity College Dublin.
- Reading at the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris in April 2012.
- Leabhar de chuid Gabriel Rosenstock, *Sa Tóir ar an Yeiti*, a sheoladh i Lios Dún Bhearna, agus an jeab céanna a dhéanamh ar son *Cáca don Rí* le Ailbhe Nic Giolla Bhrighde agus Steve Simpson i mBaile Átha Cliath.
- Exchange with Dutch-Austrian writer Rachel van Kooij, including a seminar on the role of international books in culturally diverse classrooms and an international children's event in the National Library of Ireland, an Irish-Austrian illustrations exhibition and a return visit to Vienna in March 2012.
- An chéad Chomhdháil Idirnáisiúnta ar Litríocht Ghaeilge na nÓg a sheoladh i gColáiste Naomh Phádraic i nDrom Chonrach, BÁC.
- Visit to the US, including an event at the New York Public Library and a meeting with the US Children's Reading Ambassador.
- Writing projects with children in a school (St Clare's) in my local neighbourhood (Harold's Cross in Dublin) and in St Joseph's School for the Visually Impaired (both these projects have been filmed).
- Visit to the Gothenburg Book Fair and joint events with the new, first-ever Swedish Reading Ambassador for Children, Johan Unenge.
- With the help of a small group of children, compiling and writing a children's sculpture trail at IMMA (and again, this trail, complete with comments from children, has been filmed).

(And lots more!)

Laureate na nÓg is a project of Children's Books Ireland, funded by An Chomhairle Ealaíon/The Arts Council and supported by Poetry Ireland and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Special thanks also go to Culture Ireland and the Austrian Embassy. For further information on this project please go to www.childrenslaureate.ie



Siobhán Parkinson, Laureate na nÓg, with students from Griffeen Valley Educate Together National School, at the launch of the Laureate International Library

'As long as children's books are thought of essentially as a kind of educational tool, so long will children's literature be marginalised and undervalued.'

Siobhán Parkinson is an award-winning novelist and one of Ireland's best-known writers for children. In 2010, she was appointed the first Laureate na nÓg. She has worked as a translator and editor and is a director of the Little Island publishing company.

**MATCHING
THE
INSIDE
WITH
THE
OUTSIDE**

MEG ROSOFF AND
THE
WRITING PROCESS

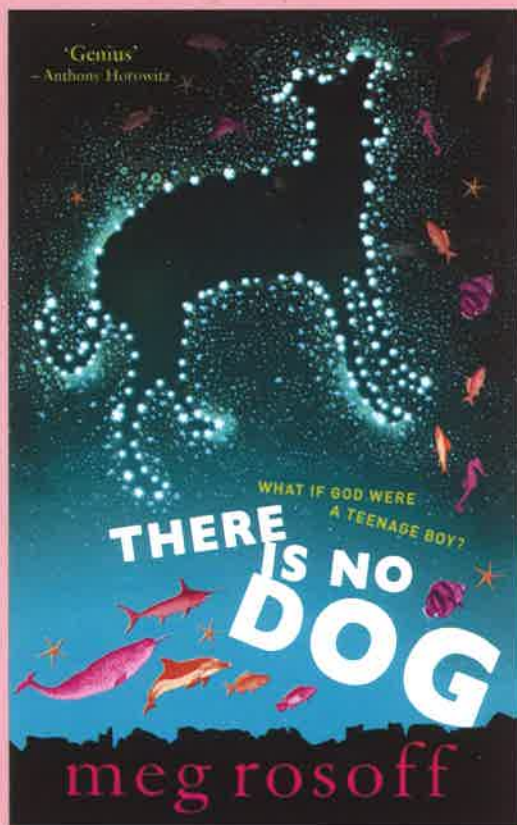
Amanda Piesse



Meg Rosoff's novels have set an intimidating standard in sensitivity and authenticity for young adult writers aspiring to give voice to young adult perspectives. Amanda Plesse discusses the challenge of capturing the emotional core of teenage experience with this critically acclaimed writer.

When I meet Meg Rosoff during her book tour visit to Dublin, she has just finished an hour and a half on stage. She's an extraordinarily compelling presence in front of a large audience; relaxed, direct, engaged and engaging, thinking carefully before she responds to questions from her interviewer or from the floor, nearly always finishing that response with a question back that demonstrates a genuine interest in eliciting the opinion of the other person. And it's all so compelling because it's clearly not a performance, just Rosoff genuinely curious and hugely enjoying every moment. When she's finished signing books and chatting to the long line of young people queuing, she comes over and greets me (we've met before) and we decide to do the interview side by side on a lobby sofa over a cup of coffee rather than heading anywhere more formal. I pull out the list of elaborate questions and quotations I've prepared. I really should have known better. The interview immediately takes on a life of its own, a shape driven irresistibly by Rosoff's incisive mind and direct engagement with what lies behind the questions.

Photo of Meg Rosoff
by Zoë Norfolk



There Is No Dog
Meg Rosoff

Puffin, 2011
Hardcover, 256pp
ISBN 9780141327167

I want to ask her about the relationship between her books, whether there's a sense of themes being developed (identity, love, loss, loneliness, autonomy), and about her use of definite and indefinite time and place in the realisation of the mise-en-scène. 'Oh, each book is an individual, absolutely,' she says, nodding thoughtfully. And then, in one of those characteristic unexpected leaps of logic, she adds, 'you know, like an exorcism. You write about fate, and then gender – the things that have been obsessing you for years.' There's a pause before she adds helpfully, 'it's an excavation. Or like hitting those ducks with hammers at the fairground. As soon as you hammer one down, another pops up.' As I consider this image, she continues:

For example, *There Is No Dog* – I hadn't thought about being an atheist as a child. Teachers would talk about the wonderful world we lived in, and even at such a young age, I thought 'no – it's not wonderful' – I know I thought that from the age of five or six. And that's when you start thinking about God. I never believed in God; it never quite made sense to me.

She goes on to say that her background is one of Jewish culture, a Jewish intellectualism, rather than one of religious observance. 'Religion,' she reflects, gazing off momentarily into the middle distance, 'was a bit embarrassing. We talked more about being a certain kind of thinker.'

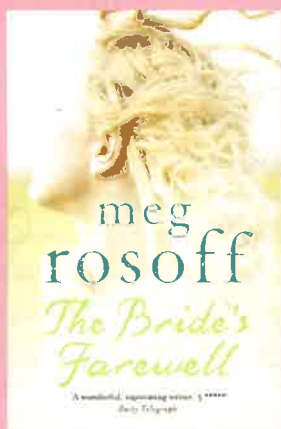
All right then, I suggest, if there's no sense of a sequential development among the books, more a sort of serial exorcism, what about the process of writing itself? Is it always the same? 'Well,' she replies, 'it's always a similar sort of sequence – a concentrated get-in, a long, long middle section and then a short finish.' The challenge, she adds, is to find the plot. I ask whether she thinks, as I do (and it's something that for me makes her the great writer she is), that each of her novels to date has had a particular moment, a moment that causes the reader to stop and think, 'yes, this is it' – perhaps an epiphanic moment of sorts, shared between the character and the reader. In *How I Live Now*, I venture tentatively, it's the moment where Daisy connects the physicality of her anorexia to her need for love. It's the moment in the novel when she sleeps with Edmond, and Rosoff has her think (or say to the reader):

And after a little while of this my brain and my body and every single inch of me that was alive was flooded with the feeling that I was starving, starving, starving for Edmond.



How I Live Now
Meg Rosoff

Puffin, 2005
Paperback, 224pp
ISBN 9780141318011



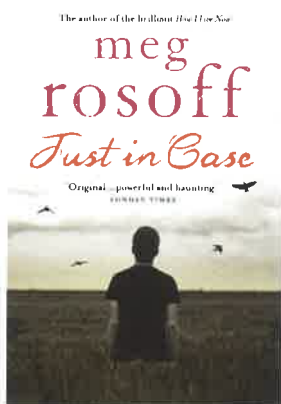
The Bride's Farewell
Meg Rosoff

Puffin, 2010
Paperback, 208pp
ISBN 9780141323404

Rosoff pauses for thought and asks me what I think the epiphanic moment is in *There Is No Dog*. She then says that the first draft of the novel was quite different; Mr B was unable to quit. For her, the epiphanic moment in the novel is the realisation that it's not Bob who is God, but Mr B. 'It was one of the most joyous moments of my whole writing career, a real epiphany, one I didn't expect,' she says, adding that this particular novel was a nightmare to write because it kept drifting off into two-dimensional characters that simply would not develop. Estelle was originally a transsexual goddess; Mona originally bet her son in the poker game and lost him to the original Estelle. 'I felt like a detective writer who doesn't know whodunnit,' she admits, but adds that in some ways that means that the author and reader can take the journey through the text together, and that makes the shared excitement come across.

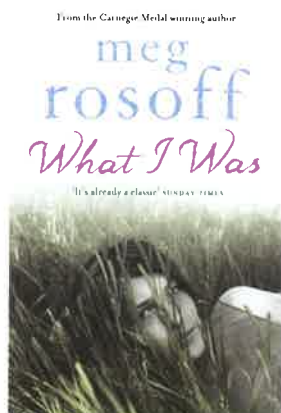
I tell her how much I admire her as a stylist. That her very precise choice of words, the intensity of diction and assurance of the narrative voice make her works of fiction sometimes feel like astonishing long narrative poems. She replies simply:

Everything I write is about the relationship between the inside and the outside. All the things that make you what you are. If you think about identity, and love – it's hard to think through every second of it. For me, it's like an albatross [around my neck] and I want to talk about it; it's such a relief to start to be clear and to explain.



Just in Case
Meg Rosoff

Puffin, 2007
Paperback, 272pp
ISBN 9780141318066



What I Was
Meg Rosoff

Puffin, 2008
Paperback, 224pp
ISBN 9780141322469

I ask again about style, remarking that the rhythm of Rosoff's writing – an unerring ability to lead up to a particular moment and then make us pause right in front of it, at precisely the right moment – is very distinctive, a real hallmark of the power of her writing. 'I thought everyone could do that,' she replies, 'and I do rework for cadence; the rhythm of the lines is important and I would reread a draft and then maybe take out a thousand words.' By her own admission, she has a strong sense of the power of the epigram from her days in advertising. The last section for Luke and Lucy in *There Is No Dog*, for example, came quite late in the process, she says. I say that for me, the line 'flooded with hope' right at the very end of the novel was the really epiphanic moment.

When I ask Meg about her very different subjects over the last couple of books, and return to a question during the public interview about whether she ever thinks about censoring some of the very intimate things she writes about, she looks a little bemused. 'I have no hesitation over my subject matter,' she says. 'Adolescence is my subject – not in an extended way, but because of myself, because of the way I am. It wouldn't occur to me to censor myself, in my books, or in my conversations with my daughter. It's about communication with people as people.' For example, she says she's interested in sex, and so she writes about it, but about sex as communication, so there's no interest in and no need to write about 'the mechanics or the details'.

We're running out of time now (thanks to a long digression about mutual personal experiences of eating disorders) and even though Meg's agent is hovering protectively, I just want to ask one last question. Is there any prospect of *There Is No Dog* being made into a film or whether, indeed, she wrote it with that in mind, as it is an exceptionally vividly realised and visual piece of writing? There's not, at present, she tells me, but *How I Live Now* is in the process of being adapted to film by director Kevin MacDonald. How much input does she have into the process? I wonder, thinking back to what happened to *The Dark Is Rising* a year or two ago when Susan Cooper relinquished all input from the outset. Typically, there's a one-liner for this that tells us everything we need to know. 'I wrote the first draft of the screenplay,' Meg replies, 'but once they get the emotional core right, and find music that doesn't make you crazy, everything else the actors and director do will be right.'

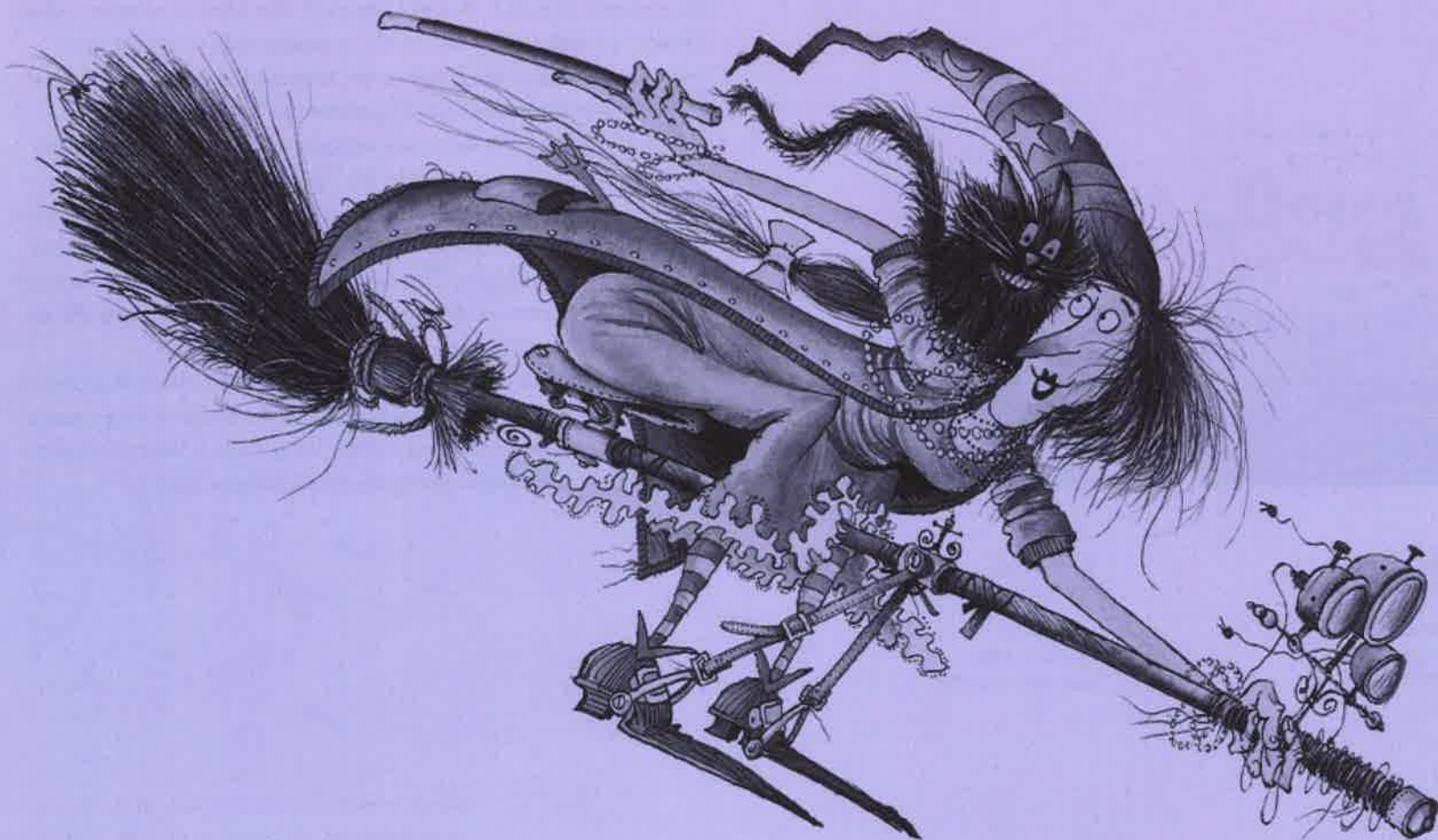
It's an absolute gift at the end of an interview that has been intensely enriching from start to finish. That is what is at the centre of Meg's books, what makes her the extraordinary writer she is – a sure sense of moving towards a pivotal moment, getting the emotional core right. **AP**

Amanda Piesse is a senior lecturer at the School of English at Trinity College Dublin. She is also the dean of students at the university. Her research interests include Shakespeare studies and Irish history in children's literature and film.

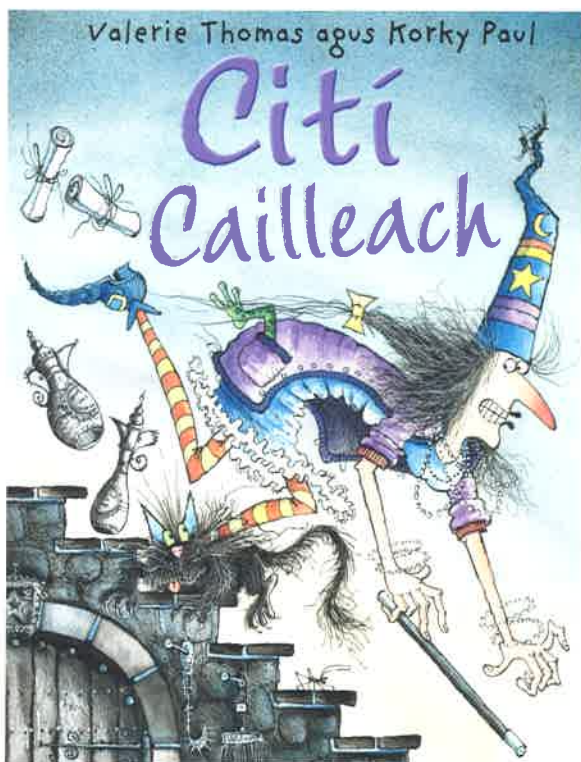
Blithering Broomsticks!

An Interview with Korky Paul

Juliette Saumande



Over the last 25 years, Winnie the Witch has become an instantly recognisable and beloved character in the international world of picturebooks. Illustrator Korky Paul talks with Juliette Saumande about his experiences and creative journey with this bestselling series.



Citi Cailleach

Valerie Thomas
agus Korky Paul

An Gúm, 2009

Bogchlúdach, 32pp

ISBN 9781857917468

Winnie the Witch © Valerie Thomas and Korky Paul, published by Oxford University Press

© Winnie the Witch illustration Korky Paul

When your birthday falls on every Friday 13th, two things are quite clear: (a) you're probably a witch and (b) you're going to age quite quickly. But of course because of (a), (b) really shouldn't be a problem. Case in point with Winnie the Witch who is still youthfully zooming around the world in her many contraptions with her unforgettable cat Wilbur, 25 human years after writer Valerie Thomas and illustrator Korky Paul brought her to life.

When his brother Donald Paul (then working for Oxford University Press in the Africa sales division) sent a memo telling editor Ron Heapy that he's 'got a brother that draws', none of them could have imagined the long and successful career that ensued for Korky. Over two decades and many, many books later, Korky Paul has gone from the 'fledgling illustrator' he likes to call himself to a well-established artist honoured with innumerable awards and with an instantly recognisable style.

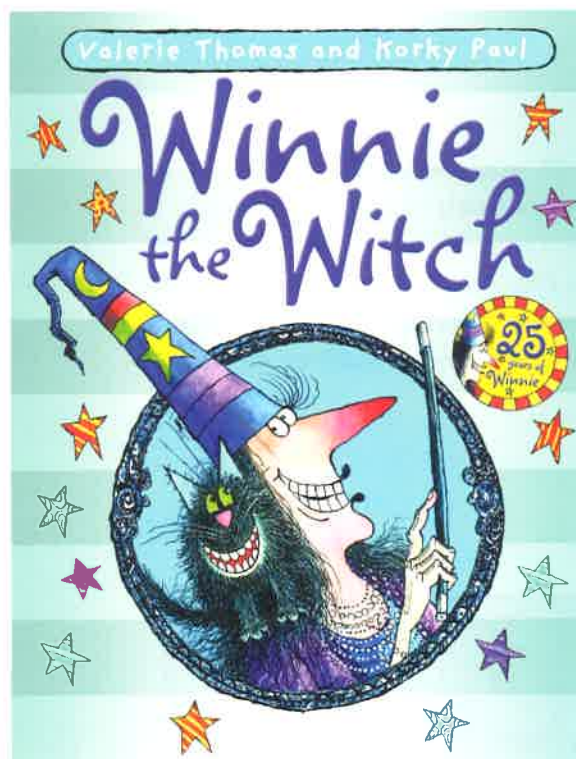
Back in 1987, Korky walked out of his first meeting with Ron Heapy with the manuscript for an A4 staple-bound paperback reader. His brief was very clear: he was to go home and draw only three pictures 'to see how you treat it'. The story was that of one Winnie the Witch who 'lived in a black house in the forest. The house was black on the outside and black on the inside'. In his initial doodling, Korky imagined that house as a little rural cottage complete with thatched roof and wooden beams. But he found that this was just repeating a cliché, so he decided to do 'the opposite'. What's the opposite of a cottage? 'Stately home!' was his answer. 'And that opened up the whole story.'

By that stage, Korky had also made another major decision: never mind the three pictures he was supposed to produce, he decided there and then to give the whole manuscript the picturebook treatment. 'What have I got to lose?' he remembers thinking. He went back to Ron Heapy with three complete full-scale illustrations (he had done his research and checked what format OUP used for their picturebooks) and the strong belief that 'this is a great story and it would be a great pity for it to be just part of some reading programme'. And was he right!

The reader became a picturebook, which went on to win the Federation of Children's Book Groups Award (now the Red House Children's Book Award) that same year. Years later, a brilliant team of editor and art director (Helen Mortimer and Molly Dallas, respectively) took the book and its sequels into their capable hands and 'transformed' them by giving them a new design, finding them a font, and redesigning the covers, etc. 'They got a look for Winnie,' says Korky, a look that is still unique to her 25 years on.

But back to the Federation award. To Korky this is perhaps the most important of all, because not only was it his first, it also was (and still is) entirely awarded by children. 'There are maybe 50,000 kids involved... When you win that, you really have touched the kids.' And that's the key, touching your readers. Korky has a whole array of ways to achieve this. He does a lot of school and library visits where he never fails to be impressed and inspired by the work and imagination of both adults and children. Teachers and librarians always come up with fun and inventive ways to get their charges to engage with books, like the class that sported 'Winnie's washing line' where budding artists could peg their pictures. Korky's sessions are part reading, part demonstration, part workshop. 'I'm a great believer in getting kids to draw from their imagination. Colouring in drives me mad,' he says. 'It's junk stuff.'

‘Picturebooks are like movies ... you create the scene, you create the environment ... as an illustrator you’re the director, the costume person, the casting director ... you do everything.’



Winnie the Witch

Valerie Thomas
and Korky Paul

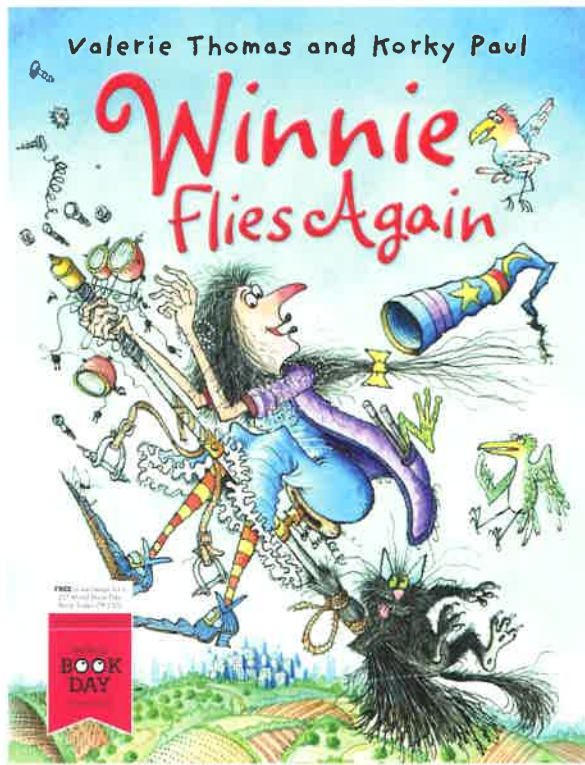
Oxford University Press, 2012
Hardcover, 32pp
ISBN 9780192793065

On top of that, Korky judges children’s art competitions to decide which entry is most worthy of being published as the endpapers of his books, and he replies painstakingly to fan mail (sending little posters, drawing on the envelope and addressing it to them). He also has a secret weapon: in each of his books he includes a deliberate mistake, a reference to another book or artist and waits for a reaction. They never fail to come as his readers (of all ages) have a keen eye when it comes to bathrooms disappearing from Winnie’s house, a funny inscription in Greek in the background, a pastiche of Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (with Winnie starring as the goddess of love) or a character stepping in from another of Korky’s books. ‘Everyone thinks Captain Teachum is in love with Winnie,’ he jokes, ‘because he’s always in the book somewhere. It creates a Korky Paul world where everybody knows each other.’

Korky loves including those quirky details and goes as far as putting himself, his family and friends in the picture, either in person (in crowd scenes in particular) or through objects that belong to them in real life (such as the diving gear or the collection of heart-shaped pebbles on the beach of *Winnie Under the Sea*). He got the idea from Alfred Hitchcock who always made an anonymous appearance in his films, and from *Sesame Street* where the jokes and references often operate on several levels. This, he feels, ‘doesn’t distract from the story and adds another layer. It’s a way of drawing kids and adults into the book, and kids who will only get the joke years later.’

All of this, of course, is not in the manuscript that is sent to him. And that is the beauty of the illustrator’s job: to add something to the text. ‘Picturebooks are like movies,’ Korky explains, ‘you create the scene, you create the environment ... as an illustrator you’re the director, the costume person, the casting director, the cameraman, you do the lighting ... you do everything, that’s what’s so nice about it.’ There are no descriptions in the Winnie books, because that’s the artist’s prerogative: ‘There is no need to describe anything in the text, I’ll draw it. Do something I can’t draw.’

And what about the author then? The original creator of Winnie the Witch is Valerie Thomas, a retired primary school teacher who lives in Australia. Over the years, the duo has met a number of times, but they have never strictly speaking collaborated on the books. ‘Do not tangle with authors’ is Korky’s philosophy. ‘Leave it to the editor; too many cooks spoil the broth.’ And has the writer ever been disappointed or in disagreement? Only once, and it wasn’t about our favourite witch. Korky recalls an argument he had with Robin Tzannes over one of the pictures of *Sanji and the Baker*. In the story, Sanji is accused by the nasty baker of ‘stealing’ the smells from his breads and biscuits by all his ‘whiffing and sniffing’. ‘In the first edition, I drew Sanji with a big “smell-stealer” on his nose and there was no mention of it anywhere in the text. Robin said my picture was implying that he was indeed stealing something when he was not in fact doing anything wrong. She hated it. And she was absolutely right.’



Winnie Flies Again

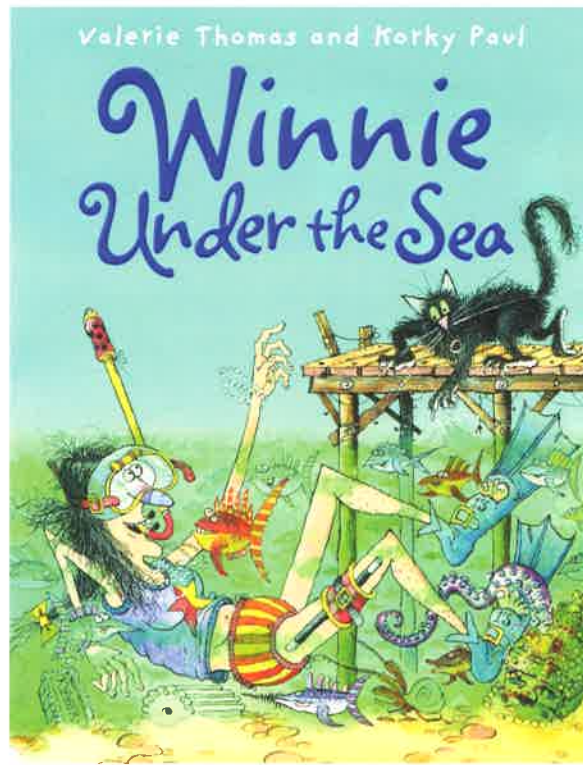
Valerie Thomas
and Korky Paul

Oxford University Press, 2006
Paperback, 32pp
ISBN 9780192726469

The 'mistake' was corrected in a later edition, a task that led Korky to add a new tool to his illustrator's kit: Photoshop. Now he works in watercolours, pen and ink mainly, and uses Photoshop for doing things like rough covers.

Technology and the mixture of old and new is also something that is part of Winnie's world. Her house is a jumble of old portraits, vaulted ceilings, grand fireplaces and modern appliances: she has a computer, drives a Bugatti, flies a helicopter and a spaceship, and surfs the net on her iPad (the model from Pumpkin, not Apple, obviously). Winnie is also exploring new worlds: not just space and dinosaur-infested lands, but new publishing formats, as apps and e-books are in the pipeline. In the meantime, she has set foot and broom in the tricky realm of junior fiction with writer Laura Owen at the helm and, of course, Korky Paul. When asked what was different in those new books in terms of illustration, Korky remembers that the first reviews were quite critical of the 'cluttered' appearance of some images. 'I took that on board; it's paperback size, all black and white and the quality of the paper is not that great, so you've got to keep your drawings fairly simple. I do them much bolder now, but always with the details.' The result is still as dynamic and quirky as ever, and still very much in keeping with the spirit of the writing.

So let's raise our cauldrons to Winnie.
To the next 25 years, blithering broomsticks!

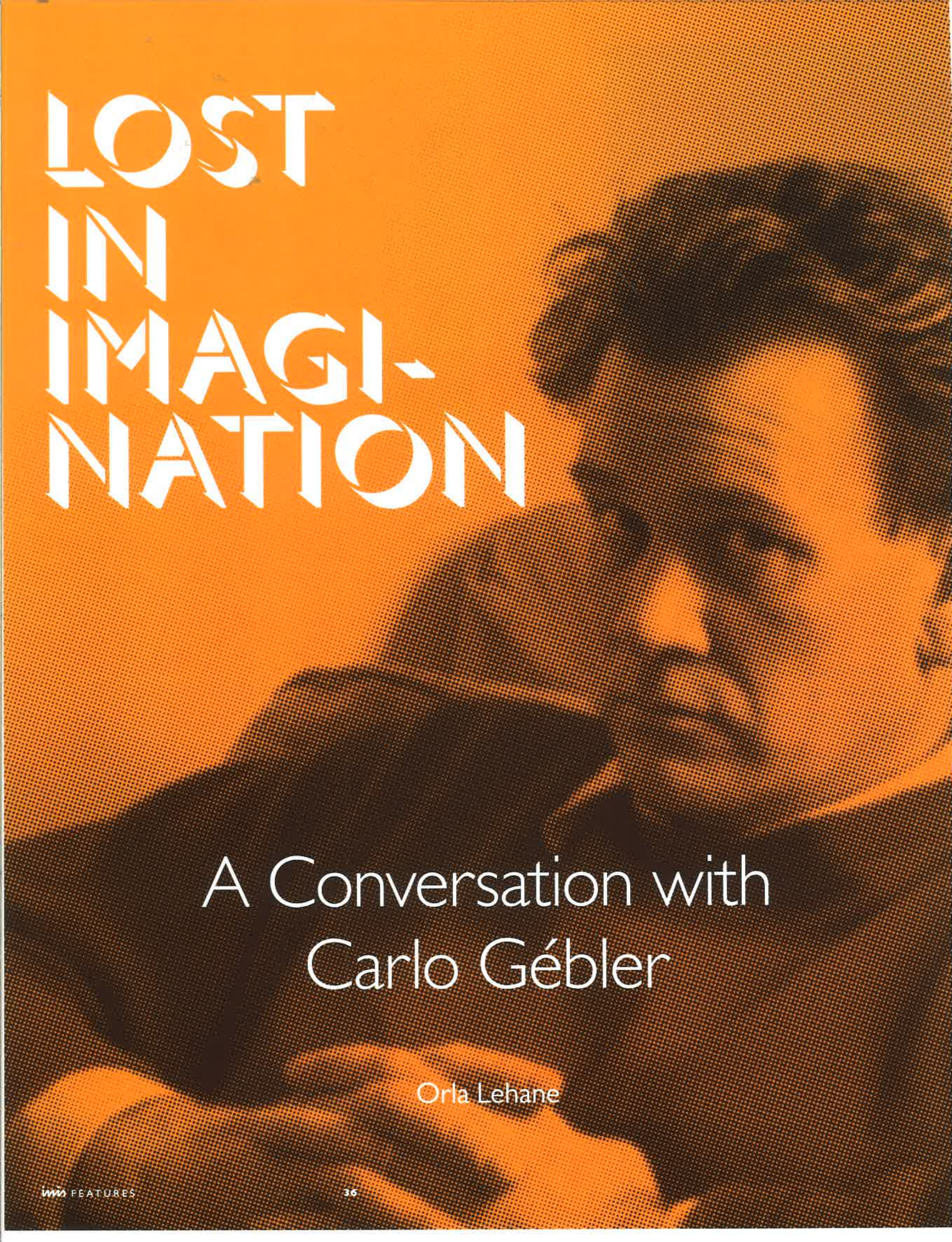


Winnie Under the Sea

Valerie Thomas
and Korky Paul

Oxford University Press, 2011
Paperback, 32pp
ISBN 9780192757470

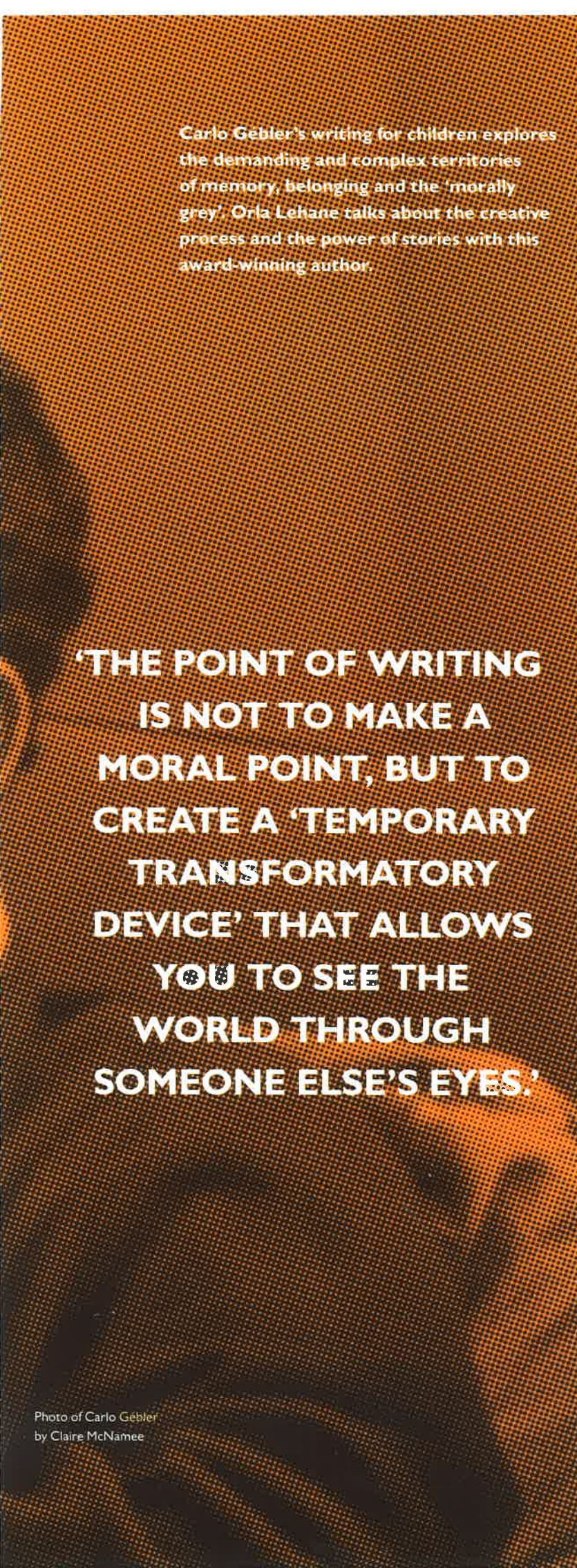
Juliette Saumande is a writer and translator of children's books with nearly thirty picturebooks published in her native France. Her first instalment in the Mad Cap series will be published this year by Little Island. Juliette was also a judge for the 2012 CBI Book of the Year Award. You can follow her on www.juliettesaumande.blogspot.com



LOST IN IMAGI- NATION

A Conversation with
Carlo Gébler

Orla Lehane



Carlo Gébler's writing for children explores the demanding and complex territories of memory, belonging and the 'morally grey'. Orla Lehane talks about the creative process and the power of stories with this award-winning author.

'THE POINT OF WRITING IS NOT TO MAKE A MORAL POINT, BUT TO CREATE A 'TEMPORARY TRANSFORMATORY DEVICE' THAT ALLOWS YOU TO SEE THE WORLD THROUGH SOMEONE ELSE'S EYES.'

Photo of Carlo Gébler
by Claire McNamee

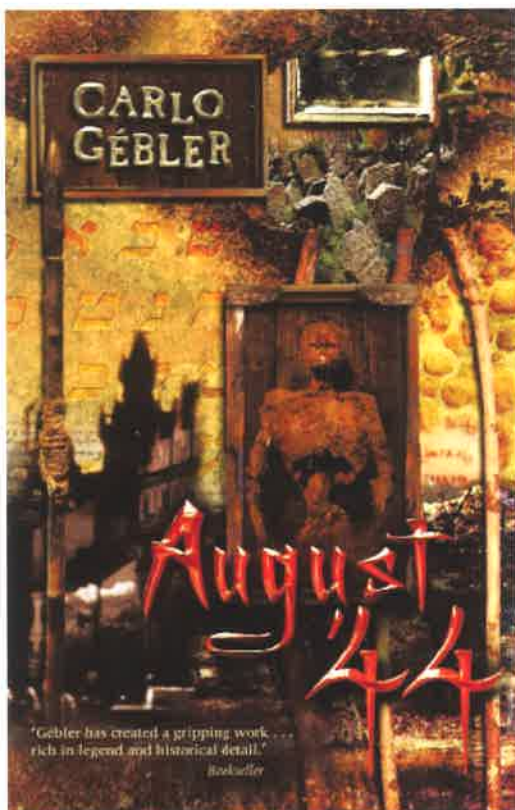
That, explains Carlo Gébler, is the best possible compliment a reader, young or old, can pay a book or a writer. When the reader has forgotten themselves and their everyday preoccupations, the writer has done a good job. The reader becomes completely enmeshed in and saturated by the imaginary world, the world created by the words the writer has organised on the page and does not want to come back to reality. This sense of being enchanted is what Gébler wants the reader to take away from a book. 'That,' he states, 'is the point of writing.'

In Dublin to volunteer at Memoir Writing and Short Story Writing workshops for adults at the Fighting Words creative writing centre, Gébler is the author of a wide range of books, including a number of novels and collections of short stories for adults, along with his award-winning children's books. He has also written non-fiction travel books, a history book and a number of plays, and contributes reviews, articles and short stories to many national publications. In addition, he has written a libretto for opera and is a filmmaker, producer and director of television documentaries. Working on such a variety of projects and switching from form to form is certainly not boring, explains Gébler. However, in terms of managing a career, he finds it has not been ideal. A 'catastrophe' is the description he uses. 'People do not like it and it doesn't work. It confuses people – some people have read the children's books but don't know about the adult books, or they've seen the plays but don't know about the other stuff.' Now he finds he has to do everything. Due to changes in publishing (often for the worse, he admits), there is a need to have 'many arrows in your quiver, do many different things' in order to survive economically.

Having written for adults and children, Gébler notes one distinct advantage in writing for younger readers. Over the last thirty years, the idea that fiction addresses issues, or that fiction provides people with something to talk about, has become more and more popular. He cites Martin Amis's *The Information* as a classic example. 'It's about a literary feud, but the narrative is interrupted by accounts of the universe. The point is: universe so big, literary feud so small.' But you can talk about it. 'You can go to a dinner party and use it as a way to start a conversation.' Children's fiction, however, 'mercifully' remains free of this and is still very much story focused.

In his children's books, Gébler's readers lose themselves in vivid, atmospheric worlds, with every word having been carefully selected by the writer. Whether recreating the past in *August '44* or modernising a myth in *The Bull Raid*, trying to be as precise as possible is the key to conjuring these worlds. 'One way of making an imaginary or phantasmagorical world concrete,' explains Gébler, 'is to ask yourself questions. What are they wearing? Is it hot or cold? What have they just eaten? How do they move around? Is it grassy? Is it muddy? When you start asking questions, why, how, what... things firm up.'

It is this precision in creating these worlds that leads to a 'good' story, which Gébler describes as 'one [in which] you keep colliding with things that seem incontrovertible and absolutely true. You couldn't make it up. Even though you have made it up. That's what makes a good story.' A good story appeals to all readers, young and old alike. Gébler does not see a difference between an adult or child reader. The question of what makes a good story features in *Caught on a Train* (shortlisted for a Bisto

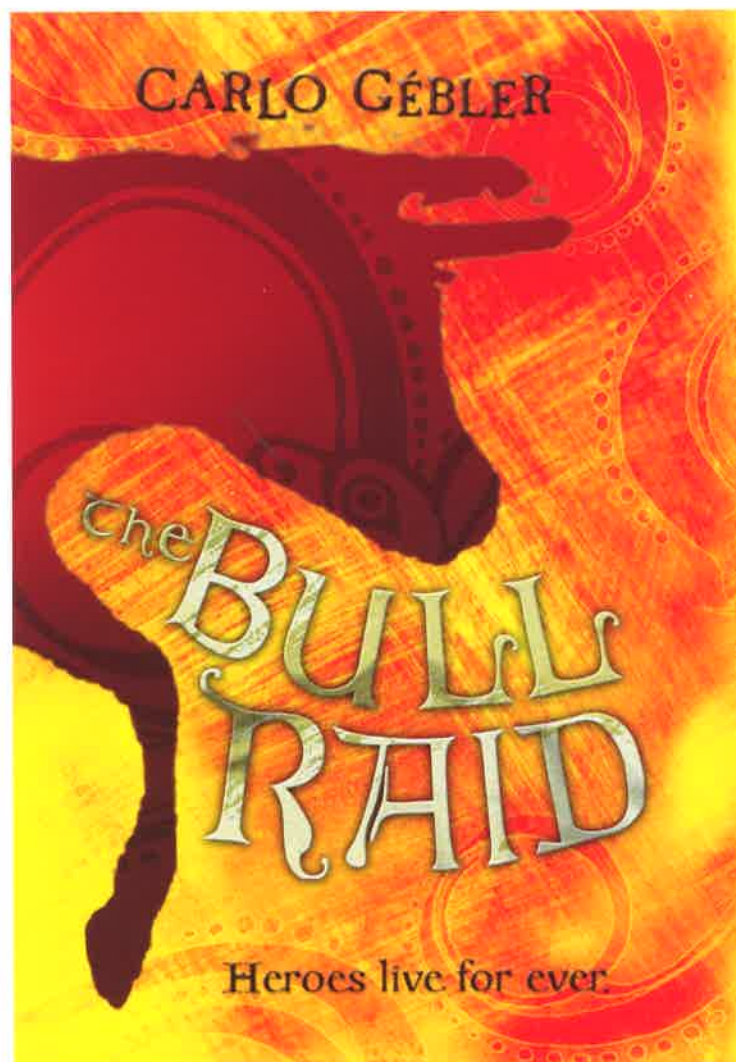


August '44
Carlo Gébler

Egmont, 2003
Paperback, 384pp
ISBN 9781405202374

The Bull Raid
Carlo Gébler

Egmont, 2004
Hardcover, 320pp
ISBN 9781405212557



Children's Book Award in 2001). Three passengers on a train each tell a story and Archie, the kitchen boy on the train, is charged with choosing a winner. Referring to the precise details in one of the stories, Archie says, 'I like the details. They make me believe Mr Smyth knows everything about the people in his story.' All readers want to be enchanted by the narrative, surrender themselves to a well-written story and be mesmerised by what is carried by the language into the soul. 'I was in a dream,' says Archie after listening to one of the storytellers on the train. 'When my imagination is fired up, the real world fades and the pretend world is everything. And now it was over, it was like waking from a wonderful sleep ... It was like a spell had been cast over us all.'

In focusing on the story, the worlds Gébler creates in his children's books are full of description – appealing to all of the senses. These worlds, however, are not always friendly and benign. In fact, they are often chilling, violent, dark places. Gébler himself describes the end of *August '44* (2003; shortlisted for the Bisto Children's Book Award 2003/2004) as 'horrible'. The boy in the story is brought to see what is done to the women collaborators and then is given to the woman that does not love him. *The Bull Raid* (2006) is a violent, bloody and disturbing retelling of the Irish epic, *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. In *Frozen Out* (2002), Phoebe has to face the fact that even friends can turn against you. When asked how he approaches writing about these dark worlds for younger readers, Gébler states that he does not think about it at all. He does not approach it any differently than he would

any other piece of work. Describing himself as a great eavesdropper on adult conversations by the age of about 10, Gébler does not necessarily worry about how he approaches, or describes, these worlds for children. He was good at picking up various bits of 'dark information' from the world of adults, listening and making sense of it, and had realised 'all sorts of unpleasant things at an early age. And I survived'.

Equally, Gébler is not interested in moral stories. Life is simply not like that, he states. 'People who are bad in life always do incredibly well and triumph. This is my experience. And people who are kind and thoughtful actually do rather worse. Bad things happen to good people and vice versa.' The point of writing is not to make a moral point, but to create a 'temporary transformatory device' that allows you to see the world through someone else's eyes. He sees it as a machine to make you feel, to have you taken out of yourself and your experience, through your imagination, to a different world than the one you are familiar with. A world with different colours and smells, different weather, different clothes, etc.

Gébler recalls the first adult book that made him realise that books could do 'all sorts of things that he hadn't realised they could do before', including transporting the reader to a whole new world. He describes this book, Albert Camus' *L'Étranger*, which he was given to read aged about 12, as having transformed his life. It was very simple, very direct, very economical and appealed to the senses and conveyed such a strong sense of Algeria, the sun, the beach, the food and the trams. This specificity

of the place, which allowed G  bler to literally think himself into a hot world, continues to influence his writing today. At the time, he did not understand that *L'  tranger* was about existentialism. He could not even have pronounced existentialism, he says. But he did somehow get that it was about *something*. It came to him at the right time. He was just beginning to realise that the world was not what it was supposed to be. That those in power were not all they were cracked up to be – policemen were not necessarily honest, judges were not necessarily men of probity and teachers were not necessarily good and kind and people who had your best interests at heart. G  bler was just beginning to realise all that, and he read the book and went, 'Yeah. Yeah, Albert. You're right.'

Camus' *L'  tranger* followed a long list of books G  bler enjoyed as a child. He says he devoured every word that Enid Blyton ever wrote and thought her books were 'brilliant'. He also recalls enjoying the print and graphic material in *The Dandy* and *The Beano*, having discovered some of the 1930s annuals in his grandmother's house. He enjoyed Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, and was very keen on Irish mythology, especially *The Children of Lir*. In fact, he later used the internet to find the fairy-tale books he had as a child. As well as Irish folktales, he also liked Japanese fairy stories and the Finn Family Moomintroll books by Tove Jansson, about a community of Moomintrolls who find a goblin's magical hat. As he got older, he read Biggles, Billy Bunter, Malory Towers, Arthur Conan Doyle, CS Forester and JRR Tolkien.

Certainly, the influence of G  bler's early reading can be seen in his children's books. The stories the passengers tell in the bewitching *Caught on a Train* are based on three stories that appear in WB Yeats's anthology, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* ('Soul Cages', 'Bewitched Butter' and 'Daniel O'Rourke'). Along with building up a vivid picture of main character Archie's everyday working life, G  bler employs an inventive use of these traditional, mysterious tales of land, sea and air. Likewise, *The Bull Raid* (2006) is a modern retelling of the *T  in*, the Cattle Raid of Cooley. G  bler would love to do something similar with *The Children of Lir*. Something very useful, especially when you are reworking myths, according to G  bler, is that you read other people's versions of those myths. 'If you can find a very bad version,' he says, 'it can spur you to write your own because you write against what you think is dreck. You think you can make it better. Writers are competitive.'

A further example of the use of a story G  bler had heard elsewhere can be seen in the way the ideas for *August '44* came about. It was 'a coincidence of things really', he admits. He was interested in doing something with the golem, the man of mud who defended the ghetto, having read about Mary Shelley and the time she spent with Lord Byron in a house in Switzerland. They were telling each other ghost stories and, as a result, Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*. 'But,' says G  bler, 'she knew the story of the golem. It was one of the things that fed into [*Frankenstein*], because it was just known about this man made out of mud that defended the ghetto.'

At around the same time, G  bler had been to view a house that had come up for sale in Enniskillen. (He describes himself as naturally nosy, going to view houses that come up for sale, pretending that he is interested in buying them.) The house was the old RIC Barracks, which had been built on a column of rock. The house had a courtyard and at one end a 200-foot sheer drop. There was a story that Fenians had managed to live in the caves below, despite the barracks being right there. In fact, the story went that

sometimes the policemen helped the Fenians in the caves below. G  bler admits being fascinated. 'I thought: this is all very interesting. I think I'm going to have that.' So he mashed these elements together. He took the idea of the golem and decided to have someone tell the story, and married it to the RIC barracks in Fermanagh, on a cliff with a cave underneath that people are living in. But he decided to set it in the South of France.

While this is how the story itself came about, the decision to write *August '44* was because he was asked to write it and offered money to do so. Economic pressure dictates what G  bler's next project will be, whether it is a book for children, a novel for adults, a play or film script. 'We live in a commercial world,' he says. 'Someone asks you to do something and you get paid for it. If it's an adult's book, it's an adult's book. If it's a children's book, it's a children's book.'

G  bler's main piece of advice for the young reader or writer is that you can never read enough and that it will never do you any harm. He also suggests really stretching yourself with your reading and writing. In our educational system, G  bler feels there is a tendency, a predilection, for staying away from the 'difficult stuff' (grammar, apostrophes, pluralisation, clarity, verbs agreeing, endings agreeing). Also included in this, he says, is writing and reading. 'Really reading. Actually hard work reading, hard work writing.' By taking the hard route, and really stretching yourself, the benefits will be huge. He also believes people nowadays are not being made to do the really hard, heavy, difficult work necessary to express complex ideas. 'Nothing has ever happened on this earth without first having been written down. You must learn how to write it down. So my advice is work at it.'

It is this hard work that will lead ultimately to the reader losing himself or herself in a story. Says Archie in *Caught on a Train* after listening to all three stories: 'In my imagination, for the last few hours, I was either by the sea with Micky Mealiffe, or in the cow house with Jeremiah O'Dwyer, or on the back of an eagle with Daniel O'Rourke.' **OL**

Orla Lehane is the education coordinator at Fighting Words, Dublin. The Fighting Words centre opened in January 2009 and aims to help students of all ages develop their writing skills and explore their love of writing. It provides story-writing field trips for primary school groups, creative writing workshops for secondary students, and seminars, workshops and tutoring for adults. All tutoring is free.



FANCY NANCY AND THE STATUS QUO: CONSUMING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

J Cynthia McDermott

Fancy Nancy © Jane O'Connor
and Robin Preiss Glasser

The commodification of childhood and the rise of 'edutainment' pose challenging questions for the children's literature community. J Cynthia McDermott explores some aspects of consumer culture and the socialisation of children as consumers in relation to children's literature and the Fancy Nancy series.

There is a wide range of reasons for adult writers to pen stories for children. Some authors, such as Cynthia Rylant, use literary experiences to share their own biographical history. Such writers connect with children to reminisce about childhood. Authors like Christopher Paul Curtis write to place historical context around a story to inform child readers of the past. Some writers, often celebrities, create stories that are superficial and suggest that all is well with the world. For many students this type of message never rings true. It is reasonable to say that the viewpoint (or desire for fame and fortune) of the author establishes the purposefulness of the story. We read children's books and study the genre in an attempt to understand the intent of the author. But perhaps that is not enough to attend to. Perhaps there are other reasons.

The critic Perry Nodelman suggests a rather different point of view in that our interest in writing and studying this genre is a representation of an inherent belief that children are inferior. If this is true, then it is the task of the adult to make them ('the Other') better – or at any rate less inferior. Nodelman argues that children's literature is in fact a form of colonisation. Bullying a lesser-powered person (or nation) only convinces the victim that they have no worth. Such efforts are powerful in turning a child from acceptable versions of themselves into the kind of adults their community wants them to be.

Books are written for children to provide them with values and images of themselves that are approved of by society. By and large, children are encouraged to accept those values and behaviours that in turn make children easier to handle: more passive, more docile, more obedient – and thus, more in need of guidance and more willing to accept the need for it. It is not an accident that the vast majority of stories for children share the message that, despite one's dislike of the constraints one feels there, home is still the best, the safest place to be.

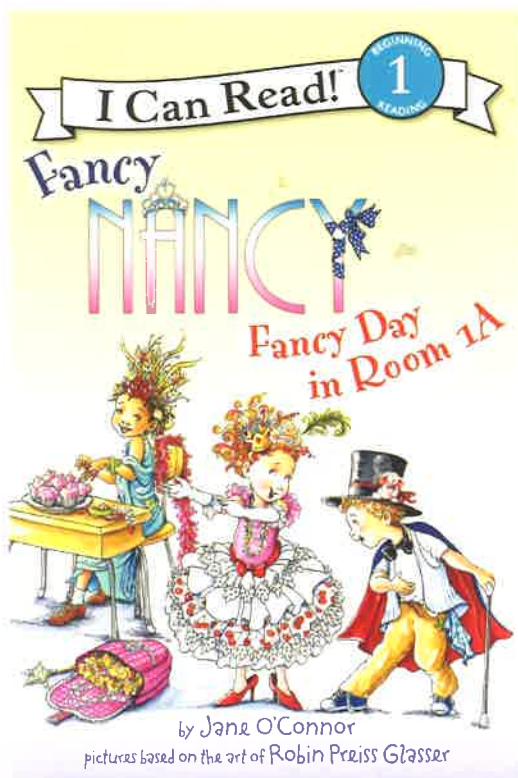
Stories that encourage silence and obedience create a mindset in children that tells them the best way to be in the world and that will provide them happiness is to be like adults, to please and to follow without any opportunity to learn who they are. Ironically, as Nodelman says, if this kind of thinking about children is an act of colonisation then in fact adults are self-colonising. The adult becomes their own oppressor, placing themselves in the position to accept this authoritarian role, while at the same time pretending to be doing the best for the next generation who

will in fact replicate this oppressive behaviour. As children are manipulated, so too is the entire community. Adults use their knowledge of childhood framed, of course, from an 'adultist' point of view to determine what is best for them and are able to be self-convinced that this power is for their own good. Adults know what they need, and will provide it. Literature is just another avenue to dominate children.

So what examples might support this concept? What kinds of stories encourage children to follow in adult footsteps with little or no critical analysis? One such recently popular series is the Fancy Nancy series. In 2010, Jane O'Connor and Robin Preiss Glasser sold more than three million copies of books in this picturebook series. The main character is a young girl, perhaps six or seven, who is enamoured with all things – you guessed it – FANCY! Her life is filled with stuff that meets her needs for being fancy and she tries very hard to convince her family to take on this behaviour as well. There are now more than 45 books in the series, a comprehensive website, games, products and other paraphernalia that any happy parent can buy for their child. Children are traditionally drawn to series and this one is obviously extremely popular. Children often request books that have familiar characters, which is why Disney books and Dora the Explorer sell well because of the television and movie presence.

O'Connor states that the idea for the adventure stories came from the special time each week when her grandmother and great aunts would come to visit. 'The minute I would hear the doorbell ring, I'd run into my room, throw on my tutu, wrap this red cape I had and I'd come galumphing out in my mother's high heels and I felt that I was ready to greet my guests – that I was appropriately elegant for them.' For Nancy, she continues, 'in her world, it means putting frilly toothpicks into sandwiches. It means adding lace trim to your soccer socks. She turns her own plain bed into a canopy bed by rigging up a sheet with a broom and a mop. So it's all homemade do-it-yourself fancy.'

One could argue that O'Connor's personal experience of gathering items from her home and playing dress-up is an example of a creative act and one that does not encourage consumerism. However, Nancy has lots and lots and lots of stuff that someone had to have purchased for her. Her room is stuffed to overflowing with things. She is an excellent model for unabashed consumerism.



Fancy Nancy: Fancy Day in Room 1A (I Can Read! Fancy Nancy – Level 1)
Jane O'Connor

HarperCollins US, 2012
Paperback, 32pp
ISBN 9780062083043

But what difference does that make? Children are increasingly targeted by the advertising/marketing industry as their financial influence and purchasing power steadily increases. They are being quietly conditioned to believe that what they buy, what they eat and what they wear is who they are. The buying power of children tops \$18 billion in the United States alone. Preschoolers aged 3 to 5, younger children aged 6 to 8, and tweens aged 9 to 11 – a compact consumer group that's nearly 36 million children strong – continue to pack a punch in purchasing power. Concurrently, families spend more than \$115 billion on children in key consumer areas, such as food, clothing, personal-care items, entertainment, and reading materials. Almost half of this total, \$58.3 billion, is devoted to food expenditures. By Packaged Facts estimates (www.packagedfacts.com), annual expenditures by families on consumer goods for kids reached approximately \$143 billion by 2010.

But are books included in this marketing effort? Do they have an influence and what might that be? Studies about the influence of television, phone apps, product placement in movies and video games all show that their purpose is to influence children to buy, buy, buy. The evidence is clear about the success of these media forms given the amount of money spent on them. Psychologist Sandra Calvert, whose research explores product marketing to children, has found that marketing strategies make children younger than eight especially vulnerable because they lack the cognitive skills to understand that persuasive intent. With the increased disposable income, there is clearly an increased emphasis on materialism. But what influence, if any, might consumeristic books have on children, particularly the very young? What influence do stories have?

The importance of 'emotional literacy' is becoming more and more recognised in education. Teachers, through reading 'inspirational' and emotionally complex stories with children, are creating a classroom environment where it is safe to access and express feelings. Even more important, they are modelling this behaviour for their students. This effort of creating an emotionally literate (EL) environment should be fully situated in the powerful influence of story. The researcher Joseph Durlak found that EL programmes yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others and school. They also enhanced students' behavioural adjustment in the form of increased pro-social behaviours and reduced conduct and internalising problems and improved academic performance. Stories enhance the opportunity for children to experience emotional literacy.

Stories do matter and picturebooks play a significant role in the lives of young children. Stories have been used therapeutically for years through the process of bibliotherapy. When a child has an issue, such as the death of a parent, a story about another character who is dealing with the same dilemma when shared can result in a significant cathartic experience allowing the child to process their feelings in a way that is meaningful. As the psychologist Albert Bandura states, 'storybook characters act as models for the development of social roles', while critic Cynthia McDaniel has found that stories greatly influence our developing worldviews contributing to our understanding of socially acceptable behaviour. Children develop moral and ethical perspectives and values from books they read or are read to them. Literary characters have almost the same potential for influencing the reader as the real people with whom the reader might share a reading experience. Indeed, in a mommy blog, one mom stated that she can get her daughter to conform by telling her that 'Nancy wouldn't do that!'

Childhood is a time of enculturation, and books are politically and socially charged. So what is to be done? Childhoods are being so shortened that many will scarcely remember a time when they were not operating as a consumer. Their childhood is controlled by the adults around them so their perspective is entirely framed by those mores. As economically situated human beings, recognising the messages that are being communicated to our children through the books that are highly marketed and successfully sold is crucial. According to Lydia Martens, the market then becomes or is a pedagogue, and educationalists should pay close attention to the consequences of consumer culture aimed at children. As author Philip Pullman states, 'we simply have no idea what the readers are going to bring to our books or how they are going to react to them'. Therefore, vigilance is necessary to counter such blatant messages as those touted in the Fancy Nancy books. And unfortunately this message is clearly available in many others on the market.

Classrooms as public spaces where all ideas can be scrutinised need to be created. When this is done, the purposes and values of capitalism, which is the economic system that produces consumerocracy, can be fully examined. This is exceptionally timely given the recent popular response to Occupy Wall Street and other movements aimed at questioning, among other things, the impact that economic decisions have had on the world. One step is to refuse to support such stories as Fancy Nancy and choose books that encourage socially conscious behaviour. In 2008, the Education Department at Antioch University in Los Angeles began a national award

for books, the Upstanders Award, which provides the reader with a model of upstanding behaviour. An 'Upstander' is defined as a person who recognises injustice and acts in a way to right the wrong. The award honours new children's fiction literature that best exemplifies the ideals of social action and in turn encourages young readers to become agents of change themselves. It was named after Horace Mann who was the founding president of Antioch College but, more importantly, was the founder of public education in the United States.

One such novel that provides a very different view is *Violet the Pilot*, written and illustrated by Steve Breen, which was the winner of the Upstanders Award in 2008. His character is a significant contrast to Nancy and indeed provides a picture of a child who makes decisions, has a vision for the future for themselves, and displays independence. Violet is the daughter of a junkyard family but she is an avid inventor. She loves to take pieces of this and parts of that and create inventions that move. The other children in her school, however, see her as odd and bully her. One day she and her dog Orville see an ad for a flying contest. Enthusiastically, she begins constructing her very own plane. On the day of the contest as she is flying to the air show, she sees the entire boy scout troop in trouble in the roaring river below. Some of these boys were exactly the ones who tormented her, but she is an upstander so she rescues them all! Of course, she misses the air show and returns home heartbroken. She eventually gets credit for what she did, but more important is her clear desire to be a pilot and follow in the footsteps of Amelia Earhart. Her vision is clear as well as her purpose and she is indeed a worthwhile character. Breen represents a view of the child that argues that children are creative, empowered and anything but inferior. This book and others on the website (<http://upstandersaward.org>) present a picture of the child as an agent for themselves. There is no attempt at drawing the child as conformist or encouraging silence. But Fancy Nancy does both. Nancy is the supreme conformist and in fact tries to make everyone else in her family live those values. She is entertained by her addiction and plays the role of the pretend adult, doing adult-like behaviours.

Supporting the idea of encouraging children to be critically thinking young people requires adults to find and tell the kinds of stories that do just that. It is essential to keep Nodelman's concerns in the forefront. Today more than ever we should be providing young people with the tools to be critical thinkers and who are willing to stand for what they believe and encourage all around them to do the same. Learning to assess a problem, determine solutions and then put them into effect through productive decision-making are key elements of a successful life. Violet and the Dunderhead kids do just that and the stories encourage the reader to follow suit. Sadly, the Fancy Nancys of the world will simply perpetuate a status quo that prevents solutions and is not working for millions of individuals who feel trapped and powerless to make any kind of change. Stories matter as do their messages. Providing rich, whole characters who are the kind of people we hope our children will grow to be can be done with powerful stories about empowered characters. **JCHcD**

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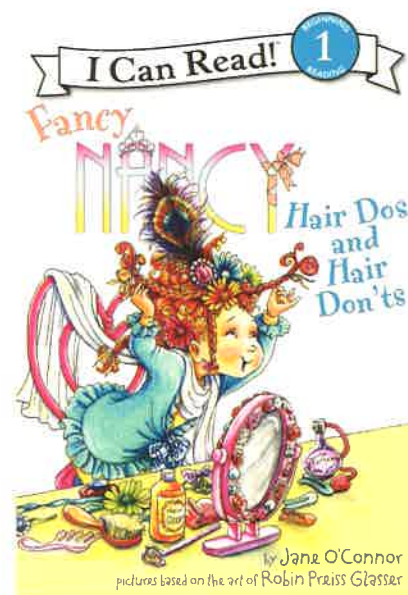
Fancy Nancy: Hair Dos and Hair Don'ts (I Can Read! Fancy Nancy – Level 1)

Jane O'Connor

HarperCollins US, 2011

Paperback, 32pp

ISBN 9780062001795



J Cynthia McDermott began her teaching career as a high school English teacher and completed her EdD at Temple University, Philadelphia, in language arts and early childhood education. McDermott's interest and commitment to democratic teaching fuels her teaching and research. She initiated the Horace Mann Upstanders Children's Literature Award at Antioch University, Los Angeles, in 2008.

Tá an-tábhacht ag baint le cur chun cinn na dtéacsanna Gaeilge don aos óg agus tugann *Inis* an-tacaíocht don ghné thábhacht seo de litríocht an pháiste. Níos luaithe sa bhliain, bhaineamar úsáid as blaganna a scríobh foilsitheoirí éagsúla a bhfuil baint acu le leabhair Ghaeilge do pháistí, chun comhrá a thosú faoi stádas na leabhar Gaeilge do pháistí i láthair na huaire. Follíodh tuairimí éagsúla sa bhlag gach seachtain i rith mhí Feabhra agus mhí na Márta. Tá samplaí de na tuairimí éagsúla a bhí ag na foilsitheoirí éagsúla le feiceáil anseo agus tá súil againn go mbainfidh sibh tairbhe agus taitneamh astu.

The promotion of Irish-language texts for young people is an important part of *Inis*'s advocacy of children's literature. Earlier this year, we used a series of guest blog pieces written by various publishers of Irish-language books for children as a way of generating a conversation about the current situation and status of Gaeilge books for children. Different publishers' viewpoints were posted on the *Inis* blog each week during February and March. We have given a sample of those different perspectives here, which we hope you find stimulating and useful.

DEARCADH I LEITH LEABHAIR GHAEILGE DO PHÁISTÍ

Colmán Ó Raghallaigh, *Cló Mhaigh Eo*

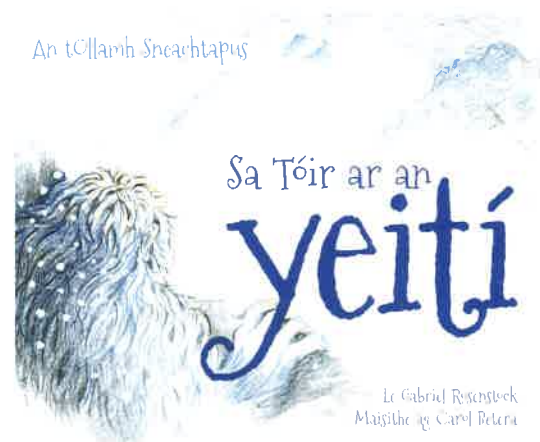
Tá cuid mhór leabhar Gaeilge á bhfoilsiú faoi láthair do pháistí agus do dhaoine óga. In ainneoin na géarchéime eacnamaíochta tá níos mó foilsitheoirí ná riamh ag díriú ar an margadh seo. Cuireadh ar mo shúile le gairid go bhfuil níos mó foilsitheoirí Gaeilge do pháistí sa tír seo anois ná mar ata foilsitheoirí Béarla. Níl a fhios agam an bhfuil an scéal amhlaidh, ach má tá, bheadh súil agam gur léiriú dearfach é ar mhargadh beag na leabhar Gaeilge seachas iomaíocht gan chiall a scriosfaidh an margadh céanna lá breá éicint.

Déantar léirmheastóireacht rialta chothrom ar leabhair nua Ghaeilge in *Inis* agus i gcuid de na nuachtáin agus irisí Gaeilge. Go hiondúil déanann na meáin Bhéarla neamhaird ar leabhair Ghaeilge fiú ma chuirtear cóipeanna léirmheastóireachta chucu. Eisceacht suntasach

é Tuarascáil san *Irish Times*, ar ndóigh. Bíodh sin mar atá, seolaimid cóipeanna léirmheastóireachta chuig na meáin Ghaeilge agus chuig *Inis* agus déantar fógraíocht rialta sna hirísí atá ag tacú linn le seacht mbliana déag anuas.

Is den riachtanas é go mbeadh dáilitheoir láidir cumasach do na leabhair Ghaeilge. Ach ba chóir go mbeadh poiblíocht agus cur chun cinn na leabhar sna meáin mar chuid dá dhualgais freisin. Ba mhaith an rud é dá dtapódh Foras na Gaeilge an deis chun é seo a dhéanamh agus atheagar á chur ar Áis, an t-aonad reatha.

PERSPECTIVES ON IRISH- LANGUAGE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN



An tOllamh Sneachtapús:
Sa Tóir ar an Yeití
Gabriel Rosenstock

Cló Mhaigh Eo, 2011
Bogchlúdach, 32pp
ISBN 9781899922789

At the present time there are quite significant numbers of books in Irish being published for children and teenagers. Surprisingly, despite the recession, there have never been more publishers targeting this market. Someone wrote to me recently that there are currently more children's publishers in Irish than in English in this country. I don't know whether or not this is true, but if it is, one must hope that it is a reflection of a healthy market rather than an unnecessary duplication of resources.

Irish books are reviewed well and regularly by *Inis* and to a lesser extent by other publications and newspapers, mostly Irish-language magazines or papers. Most of the newspapers tend to ignore Irish-language books even when they are sent review copies, *Tuarascáil* in *The Irish Times* being an honourable exception. In any event, we send review copies to all Irish-language media and to *Inis*. We also advertise extensively with those publications that have supported us for the past 17 years.

It remains a priority to have a strong and effective Irish-language distributor with a related function in cultivating and promoting awareness in media circles of the books as they become available. Foras na Gaeilge should direct its urgent attention to this as it reorganises Áis, the existing body.

Is scríbhneoir agus foilsitheoir é Colmán Ó Raghallaigh de Cló Mhaigh Eo. Foilsíodh *An Sclábhaí*, (2001), *An Tóraíocht* (2003), *An Teachtaire* (2004) agus *An Táin* (2006).

Colmán Ó Raghallaigh is a publisher and writer at Cló Mhaigh Eo. He has written *An Sclábhaí* (2001), *An Tóraíocht* (2003), *An Teachtaire* (2004) and *An Táin* (2006).

Tá staid na leabhar Gaeilge do léitheoirí níos óige an-dearfach faoi láthair agus tá an-chuid ábhair á fhoilsiú anseo in Éirinn atá in oiriúint don phobal anseo. Is de bharr polasaí soiléir stáit atá cursaí amhlaidh. Is mór an chabhair iad na scéimeanna a reáchtálann Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge, cuid d'Fhoras na Gaeilge. Tá ról na Comhairle Ealaíon criticiúil chomh maith – tá siad tar éis tacaíocht láidir agus leanúnach a chur ar fáil d'fhoilsitheoirí liteartha sa réimse seo.

Is é an rud is tábhachtaí maidir le bonn a chur faoi mhargadh na leabhar Gaeilge do dhaoine óga ná ról lárnach na Gaeilge sa chóras oideachais agus an fás as cuimse ar an gcóras gael scolaíochta le thart ar fiche bliain anuas.

An rud is tábhachtaí atá bainte amach ag Cois Life i réimse na leabhar óige ná dul i bpáirt le scríbhneoirí aitheanta Béarla le saothair d'ardchaighdeán liteartha a chur ar fáil sa Ghaeilge. Táim ag tagairt anseo d'Éilís Ní Dhuibhne agus Siobhán Parkinson ar éirigh leo beirt clasaicí nua-aoiseacha a chur ar fáil sa Ghaeilge: *Hurlamaboc* agus *Dialann Rúnda Amy Ní Chonchúir* faoi seach. Chun a cheart a thabhairt d'ardchaighdeán na scríbhneoireachta, déanaimid iarracht i gcónaí caighdeán arda táirgthe a bhaint amach trí chead a gcinn a thabhairt do na dearthóirí agus na maisitheoirí leabhar is fearr dá bhfuil ann.

Maidir le clúdach agus léirmheasanna a fháil do na leabhair, bíonn *Inis* agus *Books Ireland* an-mhaith agus de ghnáth is féidir dul i gcion ar na meáin chlóite Ghaeilge agus an raidió Gaeilge le trácht nó léirmheas a dhéanamh orthu. Ní thuigimid cén fáth nach bhfuil clár leabhar ar TG4. Sa chuid is mó de, ní spéis leis na meáin Bhéarla na leabhair seo ach, lena gceart a thabhairt dóibh, rinne an *Irish Times* léirmheas ar roinnt dár bhficsen le haghaidh daoine fásta óga.

Tá an-ghnó le déanamh as leabhair le haghaidh daoine níos óige agus is deacair d'fhoilsitheoirí beaga Gaeilge dul in iomaíocht le hollphéisteanna na foilsitheoireachta domhandaithe (Hachette, Holtzbrinck, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Penguin) ar leo formhór na n-inphriontaí a d'fheadfá a liostáil. Dá réir sin is gá a bheith réadúil faoi cé a léireodh spéis ina bhfuil idir lámha againn agus faoi conas a shroichfimid iad le heolas a roinnt leo. Téimid i muinín ár suíomhanna gréasáin agus ár mblag níos minice anois le heolas níos mionsonraithe a roinnt ar bhealach nach féidir a dhéanamh trí mheáin eile; uaireanta crochaimid físeáin bheaga le húdair nó gearrscannáin impriseanaíocha a thugann léiriú ar ábhar samplach as leabhar (féach cad a cheapann tú féin anseo ag www.coislife.ie).

The current state of Irish-language books for younger audiences is very positive with indigenously published works that speak to an Irish readership. Much of the success is due to a clear policy of direct State intervention, particularly via the schemes operated by Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge, part of Foras na Gaeilge. The assistance of the Arts Council has been absolutely critical also – it has provided strong, consistent support to literary publishers working in this area.

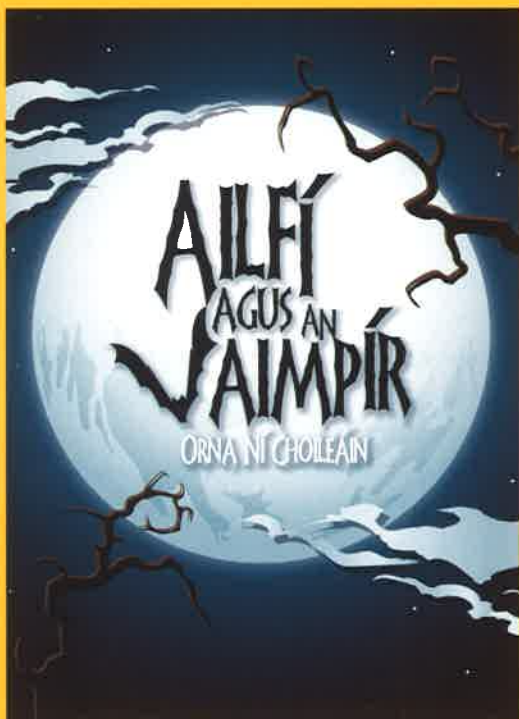
The most important factor, however, is the central place of Irish in the education system – including the phenomenal growth of the Irish-medium gael scoileanna over the past twenty or so years – which underpins the market for Irish-language books for younger audiences.

Cois Life's biggest contribution to Irish-language books for younger readers has been working with established English-language authors to produce works of considerable literary merit in Irish. I am referring here to Éilís Ní Dhuibhne and Siobhán Parkinson, both of whom have produced highly popular modern classics in Irish: *Hurlamaboc* and *Dialann Rúnda Amy Ní Chonchúir*, respectively. To complement the standard of the writing, we aim for high production values and work with the best designers and illustrators.

Regarding coverage and reviews of works in Irish for younger audiences, *Inis* and *Books Ireland* are particularly good and the Irish-language media in print and radio are amenable to notices or sometimes reviews. The continued lack of a book programme on TG4 is unfathomable. The English-language media generally are not interested in these types of books but, to give it its due, *The Irish Times* has reviewed some of our young adult fiction.

Books for younger audiences are very big business and small Irish-language publishers can rarely match the marketing fire power of the handful of globalised publishing conglomerates (Hachette, Holtzbrinck, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Penguin) that owns practically all the imprints most of us could name. Consequently, we're realistic about who is interested in what we do and imaginative in how we reach them and inform them. Increasingly, we use our own website and blog to tell people about our books in greater detail than can be done by other means; sometimes we shoot short videos with our authors; other times we make playful animations showing sample material from inside the book itself (judge for yourself at www.coislife.ie).

‘The most important factor ... is the central place of Irish in the education system.’



Ailfí agus an Vampír
Orna Ní Choileáin

Cois Life, 2012
Bogchlúdach, 124pp
ISBN 9781907494208

'Is é an rud is tábhachtaí maidir le bonn a chur faoi mhargadh na leabhar Gaeilge do dhaoine óga ná ról lárnach na Gaeilge sa chóras oideachais.'

Is comhbhunaitheoir é Seán Ó Cearnaigh le Caoilfhionn Nic Pháidín ar Cois Life in 1995. Is iar-uachtarán é ar Fhoilsiú Éireann/Publishing Ireland. Fostaí de chuid Foras na Gaeilge is ea Seán Ó Cearnaigh ó 2004. Aistríodh Bord na Leabhar Gaeilge (ina dhiaidh sin Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge) isteach i bhForas na Gaeilge in 2008.

In 1995, Seán Ó Cearnaigh co-founded Cois Life with Caoilfhionn Nic Pháidín. Seán is a former president of Foilsiú Éireann/Publishing Ireland. He has been an employee of Foras na Gaeilge since 2004. Bord na Leabhar Gaeilge (thereafter Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge) was transferred into Foras na Gaeilge in 2008.

Seosamh Ó Murchú, An Gúm

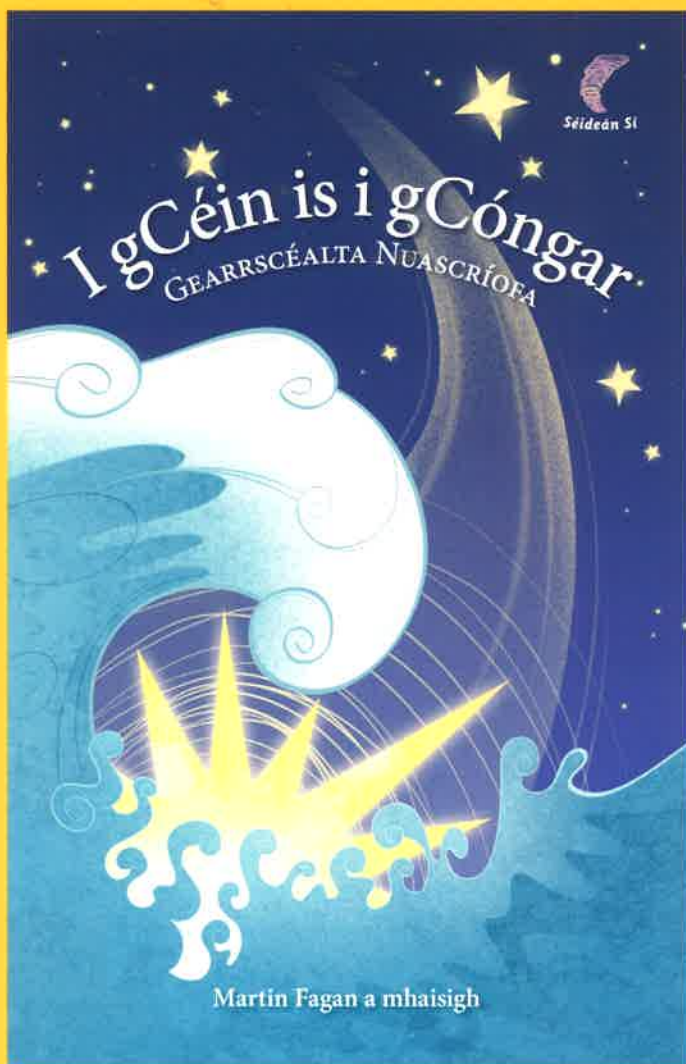
Caighdeán na bhfoilseachán Gaeilge atá á gcur ar fáil do dhaoine óga, déarfainn go bhfuil sé níos fearr faoi láthair ná mar a bhí riamh. Bhí tráth ann nuair ba é An Gúm amháin, geall leis, a bhíodh ag foilsiú ábhar do dhaoine óga. Ach le dornán blianta anuas tá scata foilsitheoirí neamhspleácha taghtar ar an bhfód agus ábhar den scoth á fhoilsiú acu. Tá An Gúm ag foilsiú leabhar do dhaoine óga ón uair a bunaíodh é in 1926. Idir 10 agus 15 theideal in aghaidh na bliana a fhoilsímid sa lá atá inniu ann. De ghnáth bíonn meascán sna leabhair Ghaeilge a fhoilsítear idir bhunleabhair agus aistriúcháin a chuirtear i gcló mar chomheagráin le foilsitheoirí eile thar lear. An buntáiste a bhaineann leis na comheagráin ná gur féidir leabhair ar ardchaighdeán a chur ar fáil nach gcosnaíonn a leathoiread is a chosnaíonn sé bunleabhar a fhorbairt agus a chur ar fáil. Tá de thairbhe ag baint le cur chuige seo an dá chineál leabhar a fhoilsiú ná go gcuirtear réimse leathan foilseachán do dhaoine óga ar fáil ar shlí a fhágann go mbíonn airgead agus saineolas ar fáil chun bunúdaire agus bunealaíontóirí Éireannacha a chothú agus a spreagadh ag an am céanna.

Gné den fhoilsitheoireacht do dhaoine óga atá éirithe an-choitianta is ea dlúthdhiosca fuaimne a bheith ag gabháil le leabhair, leabhair do leanaí óga go háirithe. Tá sé seo tite amach de thoradh éilimh ó na bunscoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus ó na náionraí a bhfuil a líon ag dul i méid i rith an ama.

Tá ceist na léirmheasanna ar fhoilseacháin Ghaeilge do dhaoine óga chomh hainnis is a bhí riamh, áfach. Ní le leabhair Ghaeilge amháin a bhaineann sé seo ach le leabhair do dhaoine óga i gcoitinne, sílim. Seachas an plé cuimsitheach a dhéantar ar chúrsaí léitheoireachta na n-óg ar *Inis* is ar theidil ó na hollchomhlachtaí móra Sasanacha amháin a dhéantar aon léirmheastóireacht a bhíonn ar na mórmheáin eile in Éirinn. Tá sin amhlaidh díreach toisc gurb iad sin na leabhair is mó a bhíonn le feiceáil sna siopaí leabhar. I dtaca le léirmheasanna ar theidil Ghaeilge ní foláir nó gurb é an *Irish Times* an ceann is measa ar fad orthu. D'fhoilsigh siad dhá fhorlíonadh mhóra ar an litríocht do dhaoine óga mí na Samhna seo caite agus gan oiread is aon tagairt amháin do theideal ná d'údar Gaeilge iontu. Ba dhóigh leat nár bhain leabhair Ghaeilge le hábhar in aon chor acu.

Ba mhaith liomsa go ndéanfaí táirseach idirlín a fhorbairt don litríocht do dhaoine óga, idir Ghaeilge agus Bhéarla, ar a bhféadfaí ceisteanna a phlé, údair agus maisitheoirí a chur faoi agallamh agus a chur ag blagáil agus gan amhras, léirmheasanna a dhéanamh. Chuige seo d'fhéadfaí suíomh reatha *Inis* a dhearadh agus cuma níos tarraingtí agus níos eagraithe a chur air agus d'fhéadfadh sé a bheith ina thúsphointe lárnach ag an táirseach. Na heagrais mhaoinithe sin atá ag plé cheana le litríocht do dhaoine óga, d'fhéadfaidís cur lena gcomhpháirtíocht chun an ghné nua seo a chuimsiú leis.

Ar deireadh thiar, i dtaca le leabhair Ghaeilge i gcoitinne, tá géarghá le gréasán ceart dáileacháin agus margáíochta. Ba bhliain thubaisteach an bhliain seo caite ón taobh seo de ach anois agus bainisteoir nua fuinniúil ceaptha ar Áis ceaptar go mbeidh feabhas mór ar chúrsaí amach anseo agus táthar ag súil go mbeifear in ann tabhairt faoi straitéisí nua chun margáíocht cheart a dhéanamh ar fhoilseacháin Ghaeilge chomh maith.



I gCéin is i gCóngar:
Gearrscéalta Nuascríofa

Martin Fagan

An Gúm, 2012

Bogchlúdach, 92pp

ISBN 9781857918113

'With regard to Irish-language titles in general, an adequate distribution and marketing network is still badly needed.'

Irish-language publishing for young people is probably stronger now, in terms of quality of output, than at any time in the past. An Gúm, having been for a long time practically the only publisher of children's literature, has been joined in recent years by a number of independent publishers producing high-quality materials in Irish. An Gúm has been publishing titles for children since it was set up in 1926. Today we publish around 10–15 children's titles a year. Typically, Irish-language materials will consist of original works and works in translation produced as co-editions with foreign publishers. The advantage of the latter is that it enables the publisher to produce high-quality publications at a fraction of the cost of developing and producing original works. The benefit of this two-pronged approach is to allow as wide as possible a choice for the reader, while at the same time ensuring the expertise and funds are available to develop homegrown original writers and illustrators.

An increasingly common feature of the publications being produced for young people is the inclusion of audio CDs, particularly in the case of books for younger children. This has come about as a result of strong demand from the ever-growing Irish-medium preschool and primary sector.

The situation regarding the reviewing of Irish-language publications leaves a lot to be desired and was ever thus. I think, however, this applies to children's publications in general. Apart from the comprehensive coverage given in *Inis*, reviewing of children's reading material in the Irish media is entirely dominated by titles from the mainstream, conglomerated English publishers, simply because those are the titles most visible in bookshops. In specific relation to coverage of Irish-language titles, *The Irish Times* has to be the most blatant culprit of neglect. Two substantial supplements on children's books published in November last year failed to recognise any Irish-language titles or authors. It was as if Irish-language publications had no relevance whatsoever to the topic.

What I would like to see developing is an online portal for children's literature in Irish and English where topics could be discussed, authors and illustrators interviewed and blogged and, of course, books reviewed. The current *Inis* page could be redesigned with a more inviting and logical layout and become the fulcrum of such a portal. The current funding bodies involved in children's literature should be prepared to extend their involvement to include such a development.

Finally, with regard to Irish-language titles in general, an adequate distribution and marketing network is still badly needed. Last year was particularly disastrous in this regard but hopefully with the appointment of a new energetic manager at Áis things will improve considerably and new strategies for properly marketing Irish-language titles can also be developed.

Tá Seosamh Ó Murchú mar eagarthóir sinsearach sa Ghúm.

Seosamh Ó Murchú is senior editor at An Gúm.



Lúlú agus an Oíche Ghlórach
Bridget Bhreathnach

Futa Fata, 2010
Bogchlúdach, 32pp
ISBN 9781906907198

'Mar mhionteanga, tá scil ar leith ag baint le leibhéal teanga agus stíl a aimsiú do scéal ar bith, féachaint le leabhar a fhoilsiú atá oiriúnach don aoisghrúpa ó thaobh ábhair de, leabhar nach gcuirfear an léitheoir ó dhoras uaidh de bharr an teanga a bheith ródhúshlánach.'

Tá borradh ar leith ar fhoilsitheoireacht an Gaeilge don óige le blianta beaga anuas. Tá feabhas ag teacht, ar feadh an ama, ar chaighdeán na bhfoilseachán. Le bliain anuas, tá méadú tagtha ar líon na leabhar atá dírithe ar pháistí réamhscoile, idir aistriúcháin isteach go Gaeilge agus bhunleabhair. Tá líon breá pictiúrleabhar ar fáil agus cé go bhfuil méadú ag teacht ar réimse an fhicsin don aoisghrúpa 8–12 bhliain, tá féidearthachtaí maithe forbartha ann, mar a déarfadh fear an Údaráis, i margadh na réamhdhéagóirí.

Ní i gcónaí a bhíonn fáilte chomh mór céanna rompu abhus in Éirinn, ná, is baolach, ag an iris *Inis* ach go háirithe. Tá leabhar agus leithchéad i gcló ag Futa Fata, ó 2005 i leith – níl ach ceann amháin díobh faoi léirmheas ar shuíomh idirlín *Inis* inniu. Is mar a chéile an scéal do leabhair Ghaeilge i gcoitinne. Má tá an comhaireamh déanta go cruinn agam, is mar seo atá: tá léirmheas ar 1,021 leabhar ar shuíomh *Inis*. Tá 51 leabhar Gaeilge san áireamh sa méid sin – 4.99 faoin gcéad den líon iomlán. Nuair a chuimhnítear go bhfoilsítear níos mó leabhar do pháistí i nGaeilge in Éirinn sa lá atá inniu ann ná leabhair Bhéarla, is údar díomá dúinn a laghad acu a ndéantar léirmheas orthu.

Déantar léirmheastóireacht níos rialta ar na leabhair s'againne sna meáin Ghaeilge. An deacracht ansin ná gur minic an léirmheas ar easpa léargais. Is annamh go ndéantar measúnú sásúil ar shaothar maisitheora – luaitear a gcuid léaráidí a bheith 'go hálainn' gan dul i ngleic ar bhonn dáiríre le ceird ná le ceardaíocht na maisitheoireachta.

Mar mhionteanga, tá scil ar leith ag baint le leibhéal teanga agus stíl a aimsiú do scéal ar bith, féachaint le leabhar a fhoilsiú atá oiriúnach don aoisghrúpa ó thaobh ábhair de, leabhar nach gcuirfear an léitheoir ó dhoras uaidh de bharr an teanga a bheith ródhúshlánach. Is iomaí dris chosáin atá sínte roimh an scríbhneoir agus an foilsitheoir araon, agus iad ag iarraidh na cosa a thabhairt leo – má dhéantar an téacs a shimpliú an iomarca, saothar leamh a bheas ann, má bhíonn sé róchasta, beidh fonn ar an léitheoir an leabhar a chaitheamh in aer. Tá sé tábhachtach go mbeadh eolas ag léirmheastóirí ar na ceisteanna sin agus tuiscint mhaith acu ar na cineálacha léitheoirí atá ann, bídís ina léitheoirí T1 nó T2. An deacracht eile maidir le léirmheasanna ná go ndéantar leabhair Ghaeilge a mheas in amanna mar áiseanna foghlama teanga amháin, seachas mar shaothair chruthaitheacha.

Sílím gurbh fhiú do roinnt léirmheastóirí eolas níos fearr a chur ar theoiricí scéalaíochta agus scil níos fearr a bheith acu i gceird na scéalaíochta. Ar deireadh, moladh eile do *Inis* – ba cheart níos mó leabhar neamhficsin a chur faoi léirmheas, idir Ghaeilge agus Bhéarla. Ó tharla saothair neamhficsin a bheith curtha ó dhoras go hiomlán, beagnach, tá neamhaird á dhéanamh ar ábhar a bhfuil spéis mhór ag buachaillí ann go háirithe. Tá cruthaitheacht ar leith ag baint le leabhar neamhficsin den chéad scoth a fhoilsiú. Ba bhréa an rud é dá dtabharfaí aitheantas don chruthaitheacht sin.

Irish-language publishing for young audiences is going through an exciting growth spurt at the moment. The general standard of publications is improving all the time. This last year has seen a significant increase in the number of preschool titles, both original books and translations. There is a wide range of picturebooks available, and a growing number of fiction titles for 8–12-year-olds, though there is a lot of potential in developing books for the preteen market.

The extent of reviewing our books at home, and by *Inis* in particular, is disheartening. Of the 51 titles we have in print, there is one review available on the *Inis* website today. The coverage of Irish-language books in general is poor. If I counted correctly, the total number of books reviewed versus the number of books in Irish reviewed is 1,021 books reviewed, 51 of which were in Irish – just 4.99 per cent of the total. As publishing in Irish for children is now greater than that of the English-language output from Irish-based Anglophone publishers, it is frustrating not to see more reviews of our books.

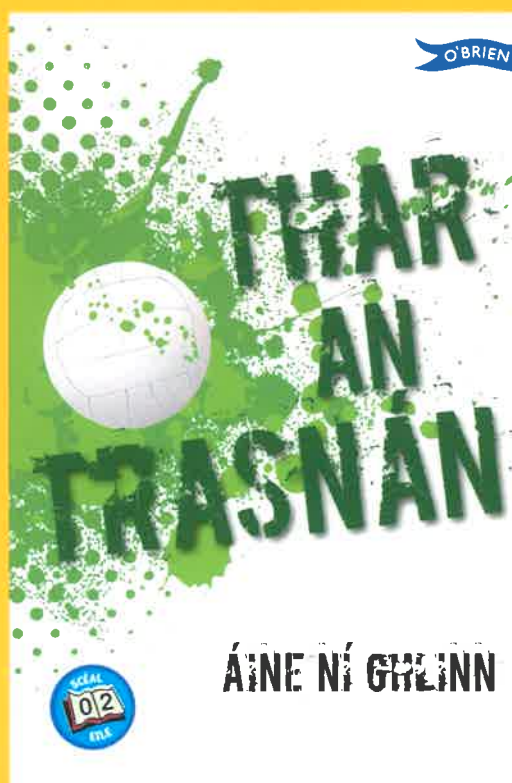
The Irish-language press review our books quite frequently. The problem with many reviews in Irish is that they are often somewhat lacking in insight. Illustrators in particular are not taken seriously; their work all too often is described as ‘go hálainn’ (lovely) without any real engagement with the craft of illustration.

As a minority language, a key issue for Irish-language readers and publishers alike is balancing the sophistication of language used in the text with the story content to emerge with a readable, engaging, age-appropriate book. Writers and publishers have to find ways to navigate this linguistic minefield while not alienating second-language readers on the one hand, or patronising native speakers on the other. Reviewers, in both Irish and English, need to be more aware of this issue in order to give a more useful review of a book. The other frustration with reviews is that books are all too often approached as language-learning aids rather than as pieces of creative endeavour.

I think it would also benefit some reviewers to have a better grounding in story theory and to have more awareness of the craft of storytelling. Finally, another recommendation for *Inis* – you should consider reviewing more non-fiction. By almost totally excluding non-fiction, in Irish and English, you are to some extent discriminating against boys and their well-recognised interest in non-fiction. Creating an excellent non-fiction book for young people demands a high level of creativity. It would be great to see this reflected in reviews.

Is foilsitheoir é Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin agus bunaitheoir de Futa Fata.

Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin is publisher and founder of Futa Fata.



Thar an Trasnán
Áine Ní Ghlinn

O'Brien Press, 2011
Bogchlúdach, 64pp
ISBN 9781847172457

Michael O'Brien, The O'Brien Press

Tá ról beag ag Cló Uí Bhriain maidir le leabhair Ghaeilge do pháistí – as 600 leabhar a chuirtear i gcló sa Bhéarla, níl ach ceann is fiche againn do pháistí sa Ghaeilge. Bheadh tuilleadh againn ach ní fhaighimid ach dornán de scéalta úrnua ficsin ar ardchaighdeán sa Ghaeilge. Is amhlaidh gur aistriomar roinnt dár leabhair féin ón mBéarla. Le ceithre bliana anuas do Lá na Leabhar tá teideal foilsithe againn as Gaeilge. Is é an leabhar don bhliain 2012 ná *Bróga Thomáis* le Una Leavy. Foilsímid 20,000 cóip agus díolaimid le díoltóirí leabhar iad ar €7.50 in aghaidh 50 leabhar. 'Sea, 15c an leabhar. Faighimid píosa beag tacaíochta ó Foras na Gaeilge. Cé go gcaillimid airgead ar na leabhair seo, is bealach maith é le leabhar sa Ghaeilge, an t-údar agus an foilsitheoir a chur chun cinn.

Tá stádas íseal ag leabhair Ghaeilge i measc díoltóirí leabhar agus na meán. Cinnte, tá fíorchúiseanna leis seo: bhí droch-cháil ar Áis, an dáileoir, mar thionscnóir agus mar fhoine; tá taithí ag díoltóirí leabhar ar dháileadh úrscothach ríomhairithe a bhfuil tacaíocht aige ó mheaisíní díolacháin, margaíochta agus poiblíochta atá oile spreagtha cumasach. Ba chóir don eagraíocht Áis, i gcomhar leis na foilsitheoirí, díriú ar mhargaíocht, ar phoiblíocht agus ar chur chun cinn na leabhar amháin. Ba chóir an bheim atá ar an dáileadh a thabhairt ar conradh do dháileoir gairmiúil. Is réimse speisialaithe é cur chun cinn na leabhar in aon teanga agus tá oiliúint speisialta, córais eolasacha agus i bhfad níos mó de dhíth chuige sin. Ar mhaithe leis an bhforás a bhuanú, ní

mór d'fhoilsitheoirí Béarla scríbhneoireacht, eagarthóireacht, dearadh agus léiriú a bheith ann ar bhonn caighdeánach domhanda. Éilíonn an cur chuige seo agus faigheann sé meas ó na meáin, ó booksellers agus ó léitheoirí. Is dúshlán é seo freisin dár máthairtheanga.

Ba chóir don irisleabhar *Inis* agus do CBI a bpolasaí féin a fhorbairt toisc nach eagraíochtaí tráchtála iad, faigheann siad maoiniú iomlán ón stát. Ba chóir dóibh claonadh structúrtha a léiriú i leith leabhar ó fhoilsitheoirí na hÉireann sa dá theanga. Gan leabhair a bheith foilsithe in Éirinn ní bheidís ach ina searbhónta gan phá d'fhoilsitheoirí sa Bhreatain!

Faoi láthair, tá obair idir lámha agam le Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin ó Futa Fata maidir le grúpa idirnáisiúnta na hÉireann a fhoilsiú d'fhonn straitéisí aistriúcháin imirce a chruthú d'fhoilsitheoirí sa dá theanga. Ba chóir a leithéid a dhéanamh i ngach réimse eile. I gCeanada méadaíonn tacaíocht an rialtais d'fhoilsitheoirí agus méadú ag teacht ar an díolachán, ba chóir luaíocht a thabhairt don rath i ngach réimse. Is ábhar machnaimh é seo.

O'Brien are a small player in Irish books for children – out of over 600 books in print in English, we only have 21 for children in Irish. We would have more but we are offered very few original, quality fictional stories in Irish. In fact, we have translated some of our own books from English. For the last four years for World Book Day we have published a title in Irish; the 2012 book is *Bróga Thomáis* by Una Leavy. We print 20,000 copies and sell them to booksellers for €7.50 per 50 books. Yes, 15c per book. We get a little support from Foras na Gaeilge. While we lose money on these books, it's a great way to promote a book in Irish, its author and publisher.

The status of Irish books is quite low among booksellers and the media. Of course, there are real reasons for this: Áis, the distributor, developed a dismal reputation as a promoter and source; booksellers are used to state-of-the-art highly computerised distribution backed by trained, motivated and talented sales, marketing and publicity machines. Áis, in close cooperation with the publishers, should focus only on marketing, promoting and publicity. All focus on distribution should be licensed

Chuathas i dteagmháil le gach foilsitheoir leabhair Ghaeilge do pháistí le cuireadh a thabhairt dóibh a bheith páirteach sa bhunsraith bhlagadóireachta. Dhiúltaigh Coiscéim agus An Móinín páirt a ghlacadh ann. Le tuilleadh dearcadh ó fhoilsitheoirí eile a léamh, féach ar an gcuid bhlagadóireachta ar www.inismagazine.ie

All Irish-language publishers for children were contacted to participate in the original blog series. Coiscéim and An Móinín declined to participate. For further viewpoints from other publishers, see the blog section on www.inismagazine.ie

to a professional distributor. Promoting books in any language is a specialised area and requires special training, knowledgeable systems and much more. To succeed, English-language publishers must have world-standard writing, editing, design and production; this demands and gets respect from the media, booksellers and readers. This is a challenge for our first language too.

Inis and CBI should develop its own policy, since it is not commercial, indeed, it is totally State aided. It should show a structured bias in favour of books from Irish publishers, in both languages. Without Irish-published books, they would be a wonderful unpaid servant for publishers in Britain!

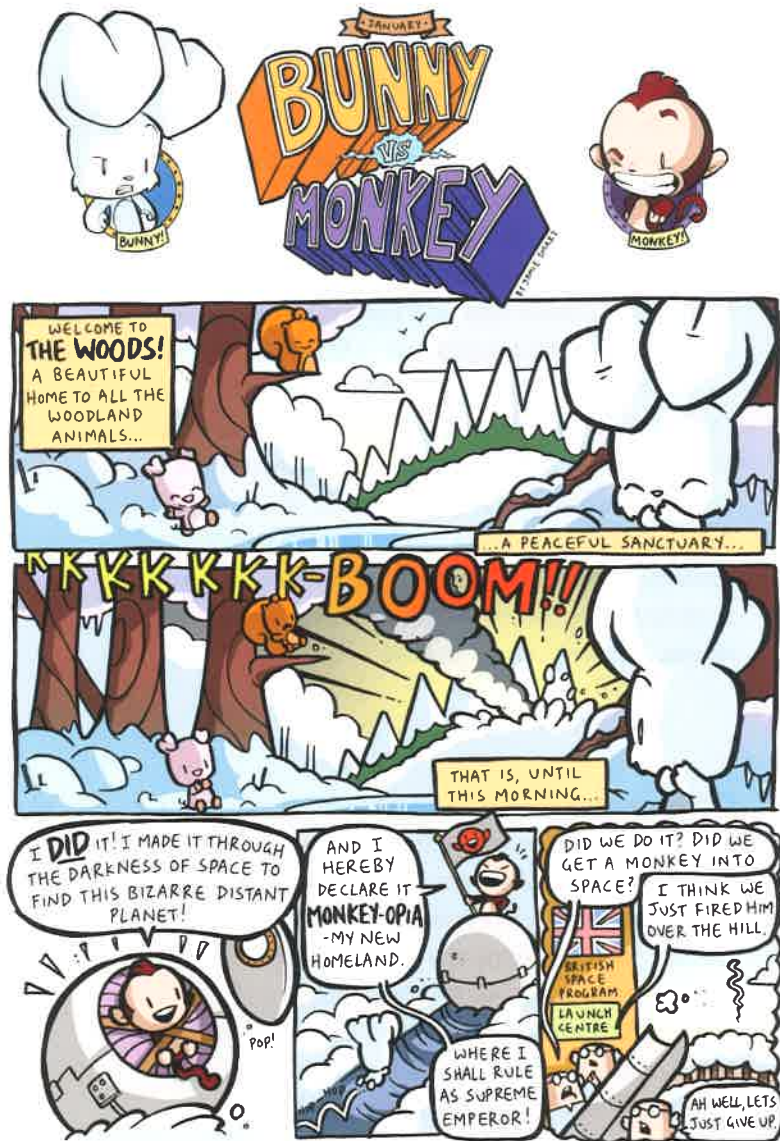
I am currently working with Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin of Futa Fata on Publishing Ireland's international group which is creating export translation strategies for publishers in both languages. This cooperation should be mirrored across all areas. In Canada, government support for publishing increases for publishers when their sales increase; success should be rewarded in all areas. This is worth considering.

Is foilsitheoir é Michael O'Brien agus bunaitheoir de The O'Brien Press.

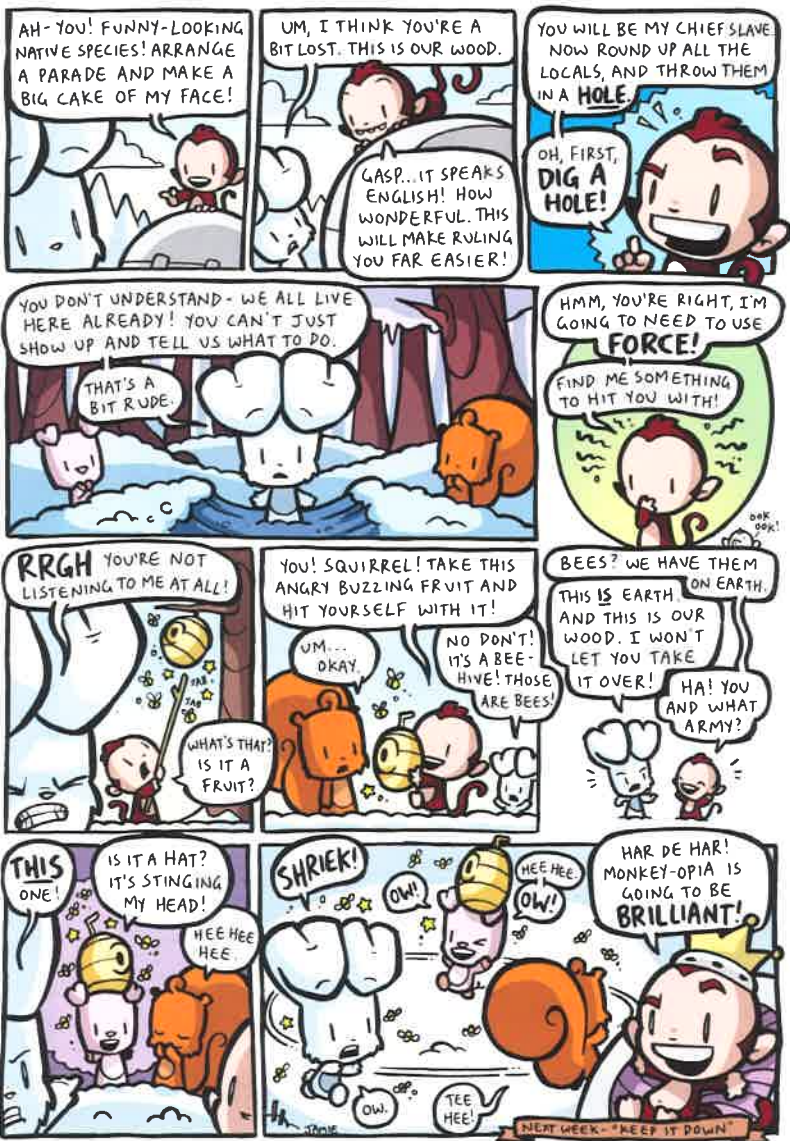
Michael O'Brien is a publisher and founder of The O'Brien Press.

FROM
THE
ASHES

THE RISE OF THE PHOENIX COMIC



The Phoenix
Issues 5 & 7, 2012
Comic, 32pp
ISSN 9772048827000



OISÍN MCGANN

The first thing that comes to mind when you flick through this new comic is that it is *busy*. The announcement on the cover of the first issue informs us that '12 New Strips Begin Today!' It is nothing if not ambitious.

I grew up reading comics: *Warlord*, *The Beano*, *Battle Picture Weekly*, *Eagle*, *2000 AD*. Back then, it was the norm for a single title to include different kinds of stories every week. Now, with comics dominated by franchises, it is the exception. Perhaps that is a situation that *The DFC* was intended to rectify when it was released in 2008 – by providing a little something for everyone. *The DFC*'s successor, *The Phoenix*, has taken things up a level, increasing the content, but maintaining the excellent production values.

And this is a great-looking comic. Richly illustrated with art from the likes of Neill Cameron, Patrice Aggs, Kate Brown, Garen Ewing and Chris Riddell, its stories range from an excerpt from a novel by Sarwat Chadda to short format cartoons from Adam Murphy and Simone Lia. The illustration styles stretch from Tintin- or Asterix-like storytelling to bubbly graffiti cartoons. This review is based on the first three issues of the comic, and within that volume, some quick-lived stories have already come and gone, so I won't try and cover all the storylines. *The Phoenix* seems firmly focused on attracting readers of the web generation who want a variety of short pieces rather than a smaller number of longer stories.

For me, this is where the comic could stand or fall. If you look at some of the titles it is competing with, *The Beano*, *The Dandy*, *The Simpsons* or even *Match of the Day*, they've all got a lot going on but, with the exception of *The Simpsons*, they're not trying to sell stories composed for a longer format. By offering the range of stories that it does, *The Phoenix* is casting a very wide net. Some of the strips fit nicely into this layout, such as the minimalist, almost abstract 'Planet of the Shapes', the single-frame spread, 'What Will Happen Next?', or short format funny pieces like 'Ghost Ant' or 'Corpse Talk' – they sit comfortably into the space given to them.

Other strips, however, particularly the longer adventure stories, seem to suffer from being a bit crammed, and could be given a bit more room to stretch their legs. 'Pirates of Pangaea', 'Long Gone Don' and 'The Lost Boy' are all traditional comic book material, but in trying to get each episode of their respective stories across in their short segments, I think they're sacrificing a good deal of the dialogue to supplement the job of the illustrations. There are a lot of words spent telling us what's happening, rather than letting the characters express themselves a bit. 'The Lost Boy' is the worst case of this, crammed into two pages with the character painstakingly talking us through every frame.

Add to this mass of content, a supporting cast of no less than nine 'editorial' characters (and that's just in the first issue), and you have the impression of a lively, colourful comic that has a lot to offer, but still has to find an identity for itself. Launching a weekly comic is a huge undertaking, and like a first-time writer with their debut novel, this feels a bit like the creators have thrown in everything they can think of. But in a franchise-swamped market, I eagerly look forward to seeing what happens when this bubbling stew of creativity settles down a bit and develops a flavour all of its own.

Oisín McGann has illustrated and written numerous books for young readers, including the Wildenstern Saga, the Mad Grandad series and The Forbidden Files series.

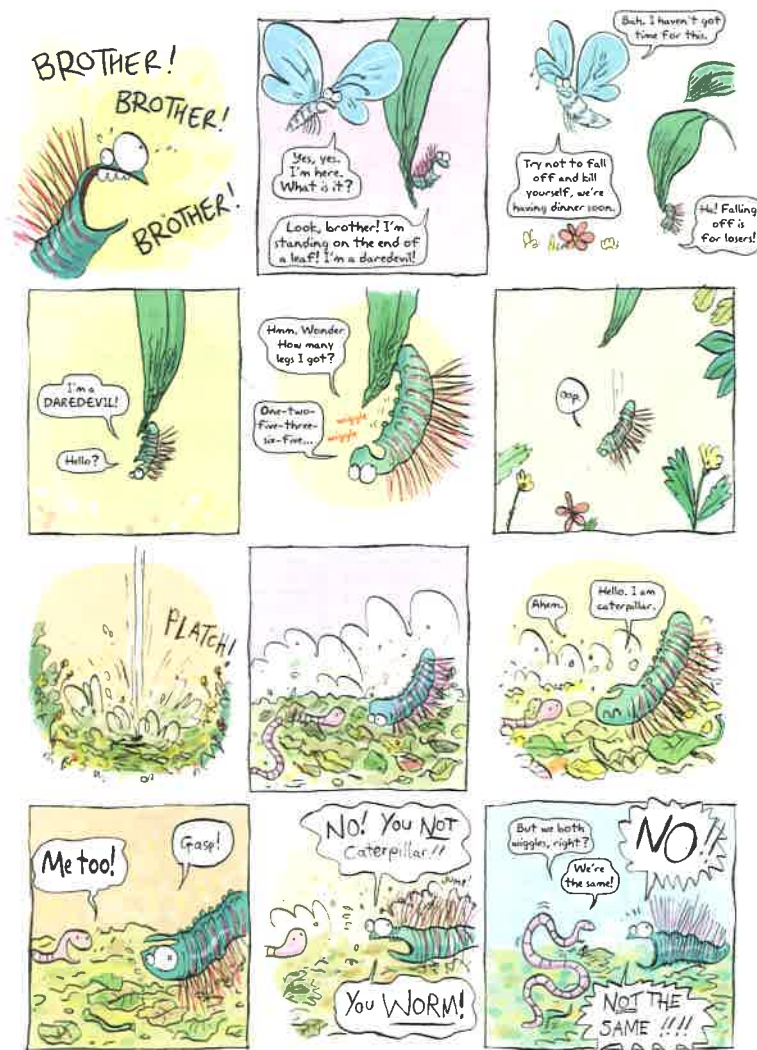
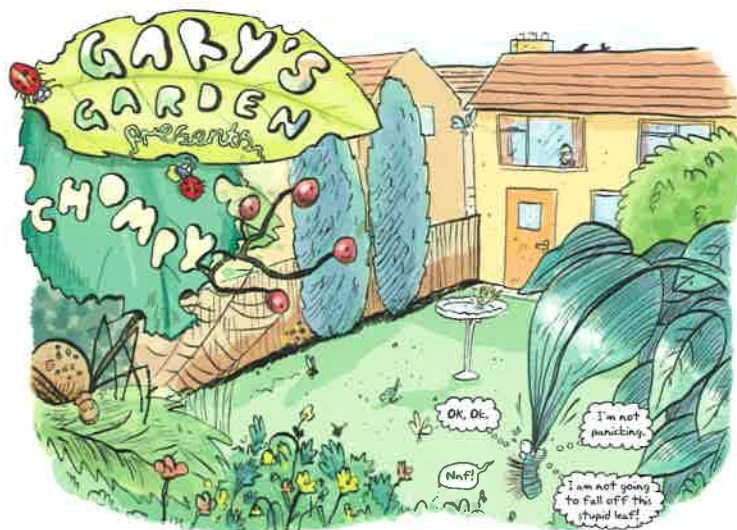


Image © Gary Northfield

INTERVIEW

Most comic projects could be considered a gamble, but *The Phoenix* is extraordinarily ambitious. As editors, which part of the project do you find the most challenging? And which is the most fun?

It's ALL fun. We are in a wonderfully privileged position – we get to have first read and to help shape all kinds of comic strips with some of the most talented storytellers working in the UK today. We also get to see all the reader-art inspired by those strips – a brilliant part of every morning at Phoenix HQ. It's fantastic to see the immediate impact the medium can have on children – they are such a spark for creativity. As for the challenges, a weekly is tremendously hungry for content and every page takes a great deal of time and care to make – particularly the long-form epics, which need to be planned over many months. (They are scripted in full before storyboarding and

the editing process can begin.) It requires tremendous dedication and very long hours from our strip-makers. And they deserve huge audiences for their work in return – but of course it takes time for the world to learn about a new comic. And to understand that they can have the richness of any other storytelling medium. So we're hugely grateful to them for trusting us to find the readership. And to everyone who is helping us spread the word.

After *The DFC*, you have a track record in publishing comics, but when you first started out, how did you go about finding the writers and illustrators who provide your content?

We put up a flag and declared ourselves open! The comics scene in the UK is very close-knit – and makers were quick to spread the word. Many of the artists and storytellers also had

connections with us anyway because of our background in book publishing for children. But, really, prior to *The DFC* – and now with *The Phoenix* – there had been very little creative outlet for artists and storytellers who wanted to make comics for children. An utterly crazy situation! All that wonderful creative talent going to waste and generations of children not getting the opportunity to experience a form which, once they're given the opportunity to try, they absolutely love.

What lessons have you learned from your experience with *The DFC*, both in terms of the content and the marketing of *The Phoenix*?

There have been lots of lessons learnt from the days of *The DFC* and some good improvements. In terms of the content, whilst *The DFC* was good, *The Phoenix* is even better! Perhaps we have focused the age appeal a bit, but we also have a little more one-off material that can be enjoyed that week. Furthermore, we have a different mix of series and serials, and a slightly new approach to editorial content because we found that nothing is more interactive with its readership than a comic. The readers want to get involved, right down to making their own comic strips. We learnt that we needed to be responsive to that. We want to speak to them, and the introduction of *The Phoenix* editorial team and news hounds like Tabs, Chops and Bruno Barker allows us to do that. It's a story comic at heart and not just full of funnies, so the longer 'what happens next' epic stories are still there but shorter forms as well. We still feature the brilliant native talent and astonishing roster of world-class UK comic strip, graphic novel illustration and writing. These brilliantly talented people are coming up with some absolutely amazing strips for our readers to enjoy.

As for the marketing, having the previous experience of *The DFC* has been hugely insightful and beneficial for us. One of the greatest tragedies around *The DFC* was that it limited its availability to only subscriptions. Now this was not its intention, plans were made to make it available in shops for the following Christmas after its launch, but it was closed before it was given this chance. We are not taking this risk and have realised the significance of making the comic as widely available as possible. It is early days yet, and we are only a very small team but



Image © Chris Riddell

we want to have *The Phoenix* roosting in as many stores and retail outlets as possible. With the support of Waitrose and ever-growing number of independent book and comic shops, this is already happening and our perky fiery bird is beginning to soar. Additionally, we are very fortunate to have the readers of *The DFC* show their support for *The Phoenix*; we can take many actions to spread the word of the comic, but having our readers bang the drum and blow the horns for us is an invaluable asset and one for which we are incredibly grateful.

How would you encapsulate what *The Phoenix* is, how it's different from other comics, in one sentence?

The Phoenix is the only weekly story comic for children, offering a brilliant mix of completely original serialised and stand-alone strips from the best comic-creating talent in the UK.

As the deadline for each week's issue approaches, are there any stress-induced behavioural quirks that manifest themselves in the office?

Tab Inkspot is a pretty cool customer. She might bat her yarn-ball around a little more vigorously when we're closing in on sign-off, but that's about as close to a quirk as she gets. As for Chops Piggerton – the pig is all quirk!

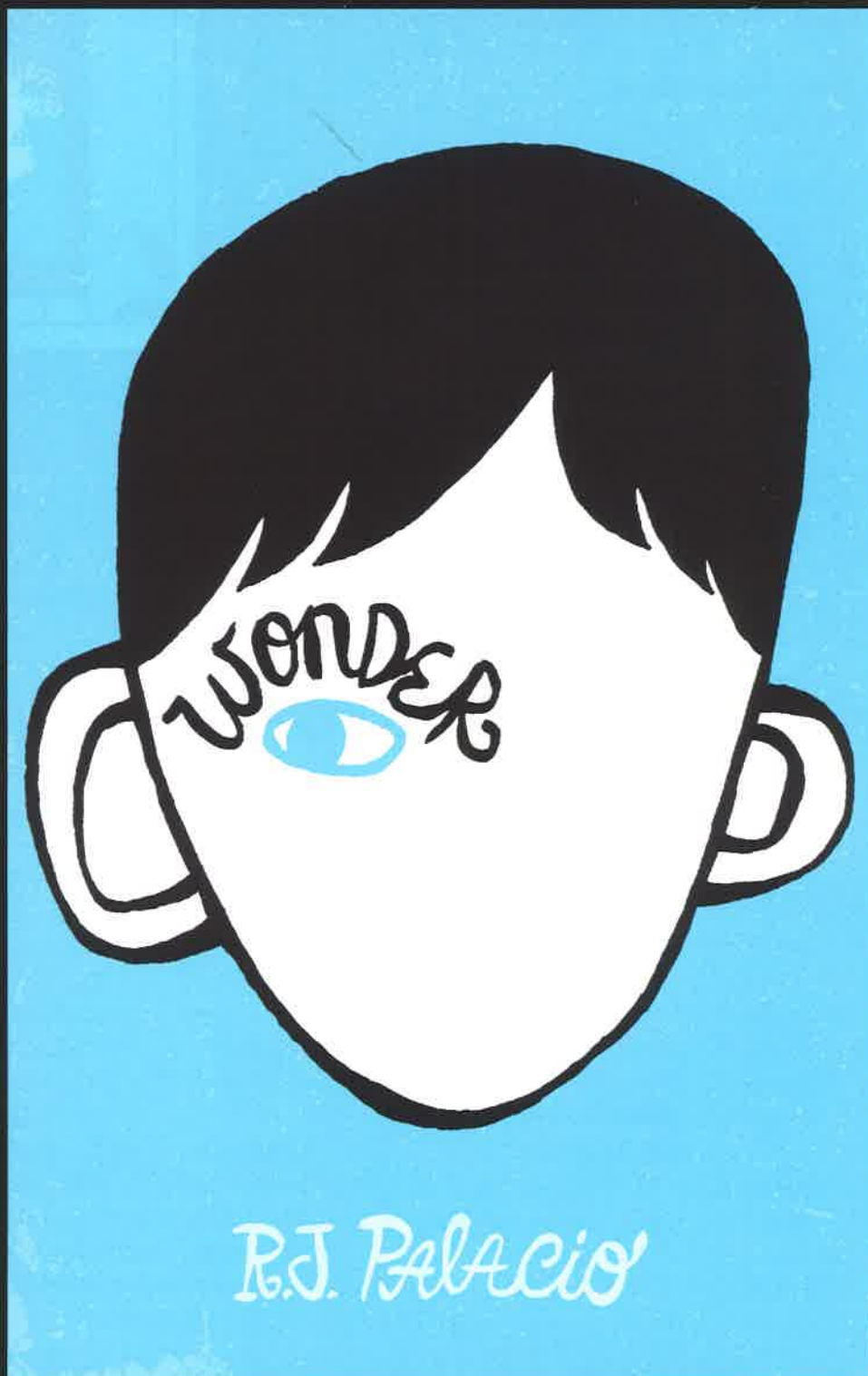
Despite the snazzy website, this is very much a print project. Have you any plans to take the comic into any other formats? Are there any developments in comics out there that you find particularly exciting?

As you say, we are first and foremost a print product, which in today's market of apps, and various other alternative forms of digital entertainment, is an incredibly rare one. A physical comic that arrives on your very own doorstep every week addressed to you personally and just for you is an amazing thing for today's children. It's different, it's collectable and in paper form it is particularly precious, we find. We are all still physical beings. Physical things to read are important to us all no matter how young. However having said that, we are not adverse to the digital possibilities of the comic; there are some great things coming out in digital format, yet for us formats other than our print project are not top of our priority list. What is most important is making *The Phoenix* right so that our readers are devoted to it. If we were to move into a digital format, it would have to be right for the comic, both visually and in terms of its interaction. In short, it would need to reflect accurately the brilliant story-strips that we have.

To subscribe log on to
www.thephoenixcomic.com

The Wonder of Wonder

Meet August (Auggie) Pullman: 'His eyes are about an inch below where they should be on his face, almost halfway down his cheeks. ... His head is pinched in on the sides where the ears should be, like someone used giant pliers and crushed the middle part of his face ... his features look like they've been melted, like the drippings on the side of a candle.' RJ Palacio's debut *Wonder* will have you questioning prejudices and reaching for some Kleenex.



Paula McGeever

Wonder has created quite a stir with those involved in the publishing and sales of children's books. It is an unusual book dealing with an unusual theme. The central protagonist, a boy named Auggie, has had 27 surgeries to correct an unusual genetic condition that has left him with a cleft palate, and, as he describes it, a deformed face.

Told from several perspectives, the story follows Auggie's transition from being home schooled to dealing with life as a middle-school student at Beecher Prep. It doesn't shy away from dealing with unpleasant issues; for example, Auggie's graphic descriptions of his 'deformity' and the reactions of the other children and parents. (Another mother at the school is rumoured to have Photoshopped Auggie from the class photo.)

Auggie's issues are placed alongside the high school problems faced by his sister Via when she grows apart from her best friend. Although very different, their troubles are mirrored and they find they can offer each other advice and support.

Palacio's language perfectly suits the voices of the characters, and the story is very well told. It does not patronise or demonise, and all points of view are examined equally. There is something in the story to please everyone. While on the surface *Wonder* is the story of a boy coming to terms with being very different physically, it goes far deeper and becomes a tale about everyman. Or in this case, every teenager dealing with the challenges of life in secondary school. It will challenge perceptions and reactions and provoke thought and debate.

Paula McGeever lives in Dublin where she writes and teaches.

Sine Quinn

Helen of Troy was said to have a face that launched a thousand ships. When 10-year-old August Pullman starts middle school, his small face is the catalyst that sends emotional ripples throughout the school, causing a seismic divide amongst pupils, teachers, parents, staff, the board of management and families.

Set in Manhattan – a city known for its diversity – one young boy's appearance highlights that extreme prejudice and intolerance are still socially acceptable responses in a school community.

When August is attacked by outsiders on a field trip his classmates jump to his defence – in spite of their previous beliefs. Dealing with multiple layers of social issues and various reactions, including exclusion, repulsion, shame, insincerity, tolerance, loyalty and kindness, *Wonder* is a remarkable book written with great sensitivity and told with insightful and authentic voices. A powerful and poignant story which should be read in every classroom, opening the floor for debate and myriad reactions.

Sine Quinn is a freelance editor and project manager.

Wonder

RJ Palacio

The Bodley Head, 2012
Hardback, 320pp
ISBN 9780370332291

Jane Carroll

In one way, stories about outsiders finding new acceptance and bullies learning the error of their ways are terribly familiar, but Palacio does enough to keep the book fresh and interesting. *Wonder* is divided between different characters but, happily, there is no predictable pattern to the order and number of chapters. Because each of the characters can be petty, or vulnerable or brave, they are presented as rounded and individual. The reader is invited to share in the simmering rage that drives Via to be so protective of her brother, to sympathise with Jack Will who just wants to be liked, and to admire Summer who is always a little kinder than necessary.

While some parts of the book seem a little too good to be true, for instance, every teacher at Beecher Prep is anxious to impart wisdom as well as education, Palacio does not flinch from showing just how horrible, small-minded and mean-spirited children and adults can be. Mrs Albans emailing the school and demanding August's exclusion comes like a kick in the stomach.

Wonder escapes from the realm of 'issue' fiction and creates, in August, a character that is at once remarkable and very ordinary. I was particularly impressed by the fact that August is shown to be flawed; like all of the characters, he too can be selfish and self-obsessed. He too is prejudiced. He has damaging preconceptions of school, of other people, of hearing aids and, like so many of the other characters in the book, he learns that while prejudice and fear might seem natural in the face of new experiences, these fears are very often unfounded.

Like many other excellent children's books, *Wonder* defies narrow prescriptions of reading age or ability. It is a quick read, but not always an easy one.

Jane Carroll is also known as Zalkag the Impatient.

Cue some loud modern noises, connection failures and long load times – what would you make of your life online in the 1990s? *The Future of Us* toys with time paradoxes using the most popular of methods – Facebook.

BOB JOHNSTON

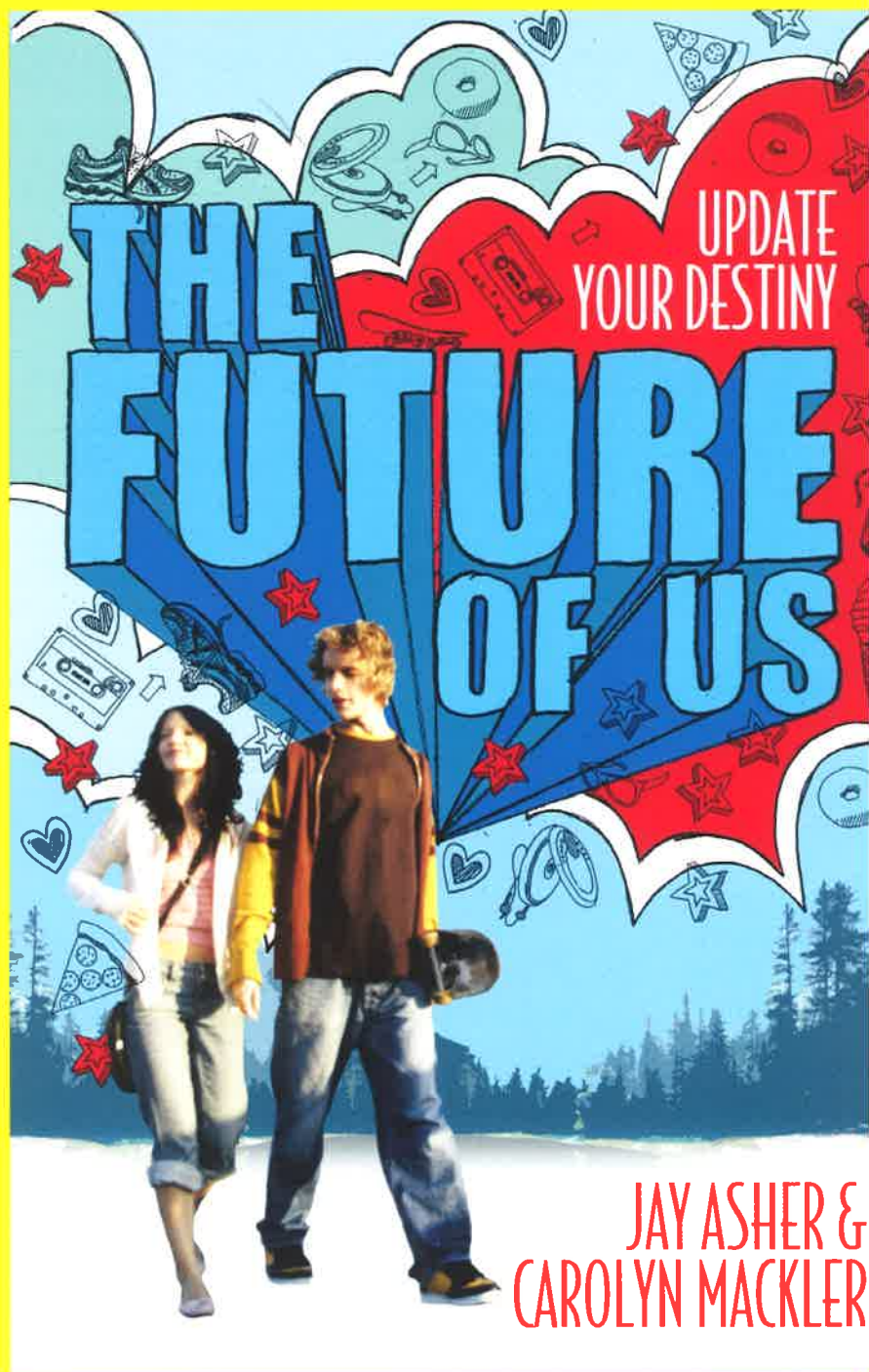
This thoroughly enjoyable novel from the pairing of Jay Asher, author of *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and Carolyn Mackler, *Love and Other Four Letter Words*, is a fresh take on the 'if you could see your future, would you change it?' idea. Set in 1996, the book is divided into alternate chapters narrated by Emma and Josh, neighbours and previously best friends (until Josh misread the signals and thought Emma wanted more).

When Emma gets her first PC and inserts an AOL CD-ROM, she expects to discover the new and exciting world of the internet and online chatrooms. Instead she gains access to an unknown website called Facebook where her future self is updating her profile with the story of her life over the next 15 years, and Emma doesn't like what she reads. But with every decision she makes in the present causing ripples of change in the future, does knowing what could happen really make her any happier?

The flicking between narrators feels cumbersome and annoying at first but you soon get used to it, and the two main characters are distinctive enough to make the construct work. The book's time travel concept is not overplayed; there is a bit of physics thrown in for good measure but it is largely irrelevant to the main themes of the story.

What makes the book so good is the subtle and intelligent way it explores real teenage issues of love, relationships, friendships and personal confidence without being condescending. Well written and intelligently plotted, this is a recommended read for young adults.

Bob Johnston runs the Gutter Bookshop in Dublin's Temple Bar, and when he's not selling books he's reading them.



The Future of Us
Jay Asher & Carolyn Mackler

Simon & Schuster, 2012
Paperback, 368pp
ISBN 9780857076076

ALL THAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

DAVID O'CALLAGHAN

In the world of Hollywood, the phrase 'high concept' is regularly thrown about, referring to movies that were born of a great catchy idea, after which the 'storyline' loosely develops. Well, *The Future of Us*, can only be described as something which Hollywood would be very proud of, and I'm sure will appear at a screen near you very soon.

The Future of Us is a story of how Emma and Josh cope not only with seeing how their life choices have panned out, but also how they both deal with this world-shattering discovery. Asher and Mackler write smoothly together and it is difficult to decipher who wrote what, as the overall voice is fresh. Character-wise, Emma is shallow, vacuous and a rather dislikeable character, while Josh is timid, nice but bland. The two however gel well and ultimately it is the situation they find themselves in which is the story that is to be told here.

The teen voices are well executed, but the most fascinating character is Facebook itself. The initial incredulity of the characters that there would ever be a time when we would post on a wall for all the world to see our family problems, personal problems or even the possibility of having 487 friends! All of this is brilliantly portrayed and argued. While the novel falls flat near its end, it is still what can only be described as a page-turner and was read in record time. Sometimes, what we all need in our lives is a bit of high concept, and this book delivers. Hollywood, are you listening?

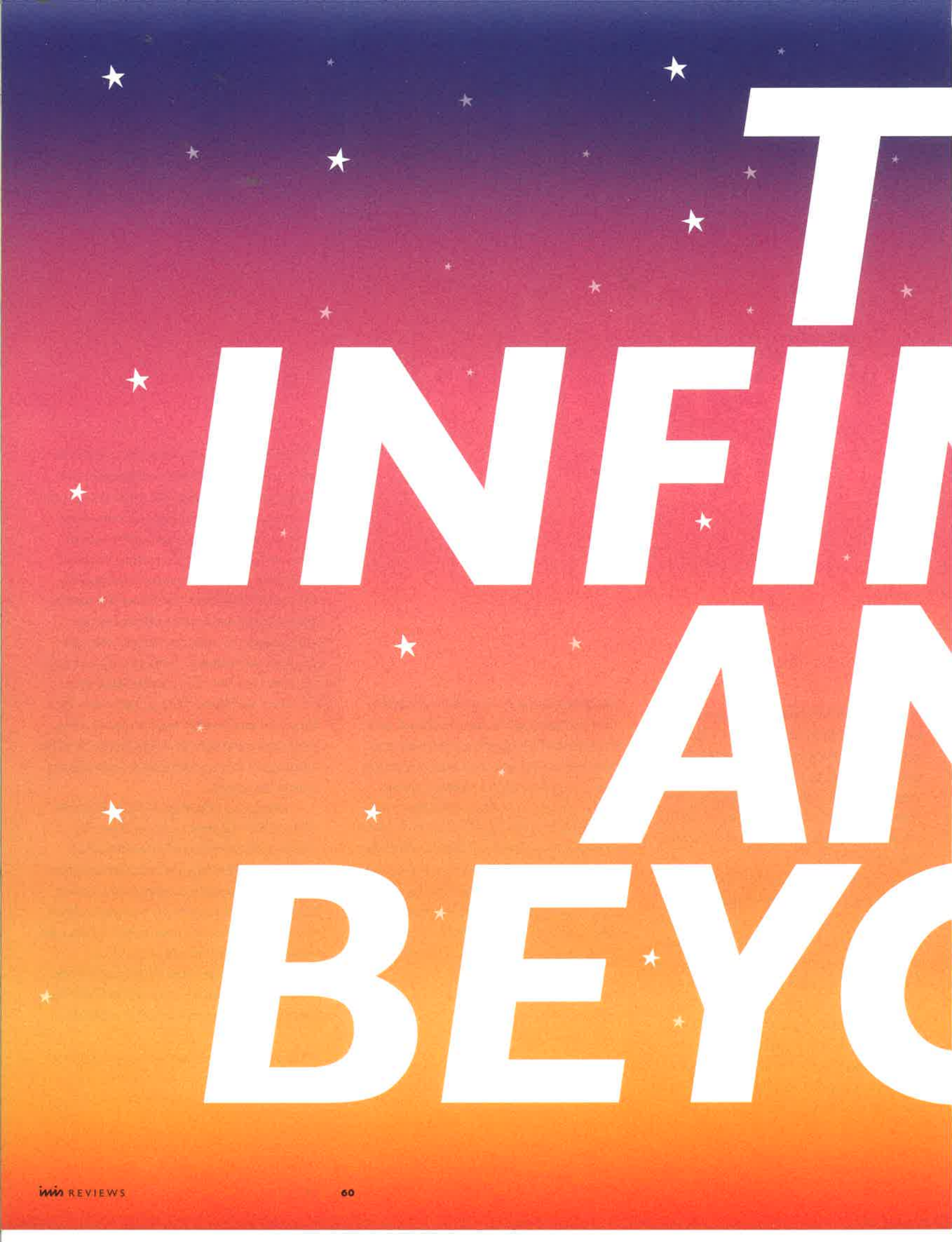
David O'Callaghan is children's book buyer for Eason.

BRIDGEEN GILLESPIE

The exciting premise is essentially a vehicle for teen romance. The 1990s nostalgia does not always ring true and feels like a backdrop, as the focus was primarily on Facebook, something so ubiquitous to today's teenagers I wonder if they recognise it as the surprising discovery it's intended to be. Emma is not an especially sympathetic character. Her future self appears miserable so Emma makes callous changes in her present to affect her future, which she monitors via Facebook. Freaked out by a future she does not want, she is preoccupied with who she's married to, her job, and where she's living. Josh on the other hand is an easy-going youth who quite likes his online 'future', until he subtly learns that he perhaps has not made any choices for himself.

Despite my misgivings, this is an enjoyable read and has a satisfying outcome. Over the course of the story the main characters learn about themselves and grow, from teenagers just reacting to the world around them to proactive young adults. *The Future of Us* is unusual in that it has two authors and the novel switches frequently between Josh's and Emma's points of view (perhaps one author wrote the girl and the other the boy). I found the structure enjoyable and this added to the page-turner appeal of the book.

Bridgeen Gillespie is a freelance writer/illustrator and independent comic creator from Derry. She blogs at www.cherryandcinnamon.com



T INFIN AN BEYO

**COMMUNITY,
AND
BOND!**

Stop what you're doing, open the nearest window and prepare to climb down a drainpipe to relive long-lost Indiana Jones fantasies. Chris Judge's second picturebook takes us on a daring rescue across the seas, through ice and snow and sailing through the skies in a hot air balloon.



The Great Explorer
Chris Judge

Andersen Press, 2012
Paperback, 32pp
ISBN 9781849394017

MARY ESTHER JUDY

Chris Judge has created yet another delightful picturebook with an exciting storyline and a vibrant illustrative style. The vivid, bold pictures tell the story of Tom's search for his Dad just as effectively as the simple, straightforward text, making this a perfect story for even the youngest reader to pour over again and again.

There is much similarity between *The Great Explorer* and Judge's previous book, the wonderful *Lonely Beast*. There is a journey and a search, drama and surprise twists along the way, culminating in a very satisfying resolution. But the underlying emotional content here is quite different. It is determination and courage that drives Tom. He has prepared well for what he knows will be a challenging trek. We see the wonder in Tom's face as he is treated to the beauty of shapes within the ice and the beautiful Northern Lights. And even though there are numerous mishaps, challenges and danger along the way, he remains undaunted. In the end, Tom triumphs, finds his father and proves himself to be a 'Great Explorer'.

Not only a great adventure, this book is a great joy.

Mary Esther Judy is a children's bookseller with Dubray Books, Galway.

NICOLA CARTHY

Chris Judge, author/illustrator of *The Lonely Beast*, is back with this second offering in his distinctive and instantly recognisable style. Tom has his fair share of mishaps and encounters, more than one Arctic beastie on his journey, before saving the day and reuniting with his proud father.

This is a fun, colourful book in which the illustrator solidifies his unique and inimitable style. The influence of comic books on Judge's work is clear and identifies his stories with those classics, such as Tintin, which promise an exciting romp and a great adventure story. Judge's mastery of layout is impressive and his inventive use of panels and other such devices guides us neatly through the story, while allowing plenty of scope for the images to embellish the text.

His trump card, though, is his use of type, which is just magic. He excels at combining image and text, knowing just how and when to use type to enhance an illustration. The typeface used throughout, as well as the gorgeous hand-lettering on the cover and title page, give the book an innocent, retro feel without ever being over-the-top or nostalgic. The spreads can be a little inconsistent in terms of detail and finishing, but there's no denying that the textures and vivid colours employed throughout make this book a real treat to look at.

The premise of the story is simple but provides ample opportunity for capers, of which Judge takes full advantage. Adventures of this kind, set in the real world, are rarer than they used to be, and although the story could stand to be a little more structured in parts, it more than redeems itself by offering a glimpse into an Arctic wonderland that is sure to pique little people's curiosity in the world around them. Kids will certainly identify with Tom's intrepid spirit and dive into his exciting adventures. After all, who doesn't love exploring?

Nicola Carthy is a graphic design graduate and current intern at CBI.

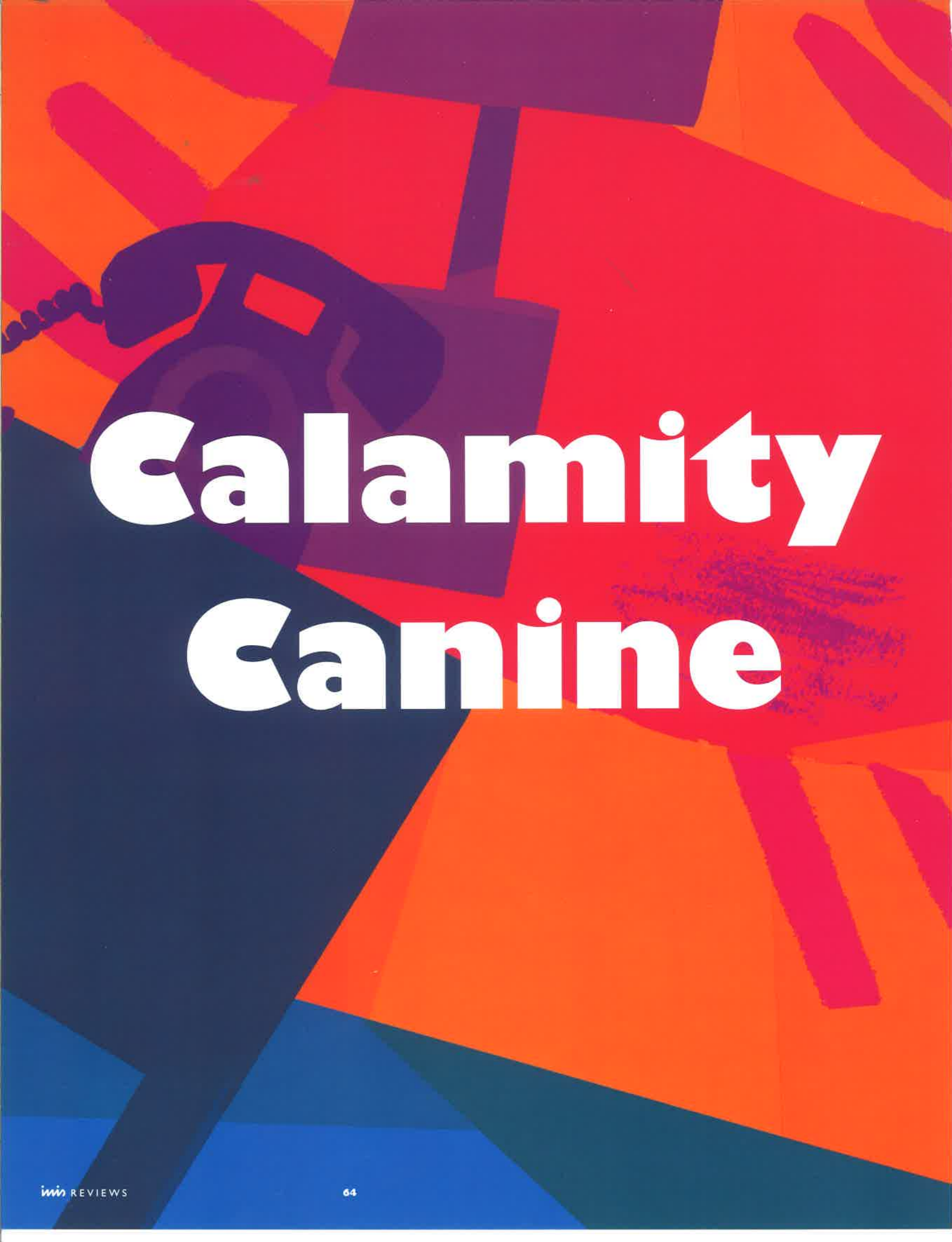
MARY ROCHE

Tom's polar odyssey involves a map, a boat, icebergs, a polar bear, ice floes, a hot air balloon, a parachute, igloo building and caves, and much more. Chris Judge's illustrations are timeless and evocative of old-fashioned Boys' Own derring-do. A mixture of Tintin and Oxford Reading Tree characters, Tom is a believable little figure.

Little boys will certainly love this book. Maybe little girls will too. Teachers will want to have this book in their classroom library. The text is sophisticated with lots of scope for vocabulary building and language development. The narrative flows well and provides opportunities for prediction and I-wonder-what-will-happen-next discussions. There are no female characters, however; this is a real macho read. I read it to two 5-year-old boys who had some concerns: What about his Mum? Does she know where Tom is? Oh, maybe he didn't want to ask her in case she said 'No way, you're not going to the North Pole'. Yeah, but he *should* tell someone where he's going! What if he fell into a whale's mouth?

And when Tom's journey eventually climaxed, two small boys sighed with pure contentment. It took three repeated readings to sate them – temporarily.

Mary Roche is an education consultant, senior lecturer at St Patrick's College, Thurles and a former primary school teacher. She is co-author of *Enhancing Practice through Classroom Research: A Teacher's Guide to Professional Development* (Routledge 2012).



Calamity Canine

Bisto Book of the Year
winner Chris Haughton
returns with *Oh No, Georgel!*,
a clever and uncomplicated
book about a dog with a
conscience... Well, sort of.



Oh No, GEORGE!

CHRIS HAUGHTON



Oh No, George!

Chris Haughton

Walker Books, 2012

Paperback, 32pp

ISBN 9781406332254

Annie West

There is a quote from Epictetus at the beginning of this book that reads: 'Freedom is secured not by the fulfilling of one's desires, but by the removal of desire ... no man is free who is not master of himself.'

If you have a dog, you will immediately recognise George as he makes his way through the daily trials and tribulations of being a dog. And enjoying his wee desires without annoying his owner Harris, a funny little guy who appears to have the patience of a saint.

The illustrations and text at first seem oversimplified but on a second read you realise the images are perfectly pitched for the subject. A dog's life is simple but often complicated by difficult choices. Those choices are punctuated by those dog looks, and Haughton replicates a guilty look with amazing efficiency. So simple, yet so perfectly illustrated – I have a dog, I know that look.

The text is presented in a chunky, cut-out-with-a-scissors font, which I am not completely in love with, but it suits this book. The book is also nice and short: I say nice and short because I don't think it needs to be any longer. There are very few words, but who needs words anyway? Daily engagements with a dog are mostly short bursts of conversation that include *Who. did. THAT?* or *Oh no, GEORGE!*

Annie West is an illustrator with over a dozen children's books to date.

Gráinne Clear

When left alone in the house, George eats a whole cake, he chases the cat, he digs the soil in the flowerbeds – Oh no, George! – but is soon repentant and tries to change his ways.

The colour scheme of this book is bright and beautiful, with eye-catching oranges, pinks and purples used for both the background scenes and George himself. His owner Harris and all the other figures are presented in cool greens and blues, contrasting their calmness with the exuberance of the dog's energy and his central place in the book. The style is blocky and graphic, but still expressive and endearing. The typeface matches well with the illustrations, mirroring the colour and confident lines of the author's art.

The repeated motif of George's misdemeanours and the constant question of 'What will George do?' involve the reader and creates strong incentive to turn over the page. Very young readers will be especially engaged by this invitation to exclaim 'Oh no, George!' at every turn, and will delight in the continuing stream of new and hilarious messes. This picturebook will also hold up well for the purely visual reader, as the story can be understood and enjoyed without any words at all.

This follow-up book to the hugely successful *A Bit Lost* is not just an exchange of 'Uh-Oh' for 'Oh-no', but a whole new adventure and a very different, if still a little dim, main character. This is a triumph for Haughton and a beautiful new picturebook for 0–4-year-olds.

Gráinne Clear presents *Little Pages* on RTÉjr radio.

Juliette Saumande

Oh, the drama of temptation! When George the dog is briefly left home alone and promises to be good, he really means it – until a very tempting cake enters the scene. And a very tempting cat. And some very tempting soil... What will George do?

As with his previous work, *A Bit Lost*, Chris Haughton knows how to establish a direct line to his reader. The text is sparse and to the point and never repeats the pictures, while the pictures themselves are bold and efficient and complement the text perfectly. Here too Haughton gets the structure totally right, with the ideal amount of repetition and change in the plot and language.

George is the star here. The range of expressions his face goes through, from doubt to guilt and cocky righteousness, is a treat in itself, although a bit more variety on the pages where the narrator wonders 'What will George do?' would not have gone amiss. That said, it is a wonder how Haughton manages to convey so much emotion and translate complex dilemmas in such a simple book. It's all in the detail, of course, in how George confidently proclaims he'll be good, but qualifies his statement immediately: 'I *hope* I'll be good' and then 'I *said* I'd be good'.

Far from posing as a cautionary tale and imposing a stale moral message, *Oh No, George!* acknowledges what hard work being good can be and always remains on its hero's side, right until the delightfully open ending. George may or may not be good, but he's *great*. Very highly recommended.

Juliette Saumande is a writer and translator of children's books.





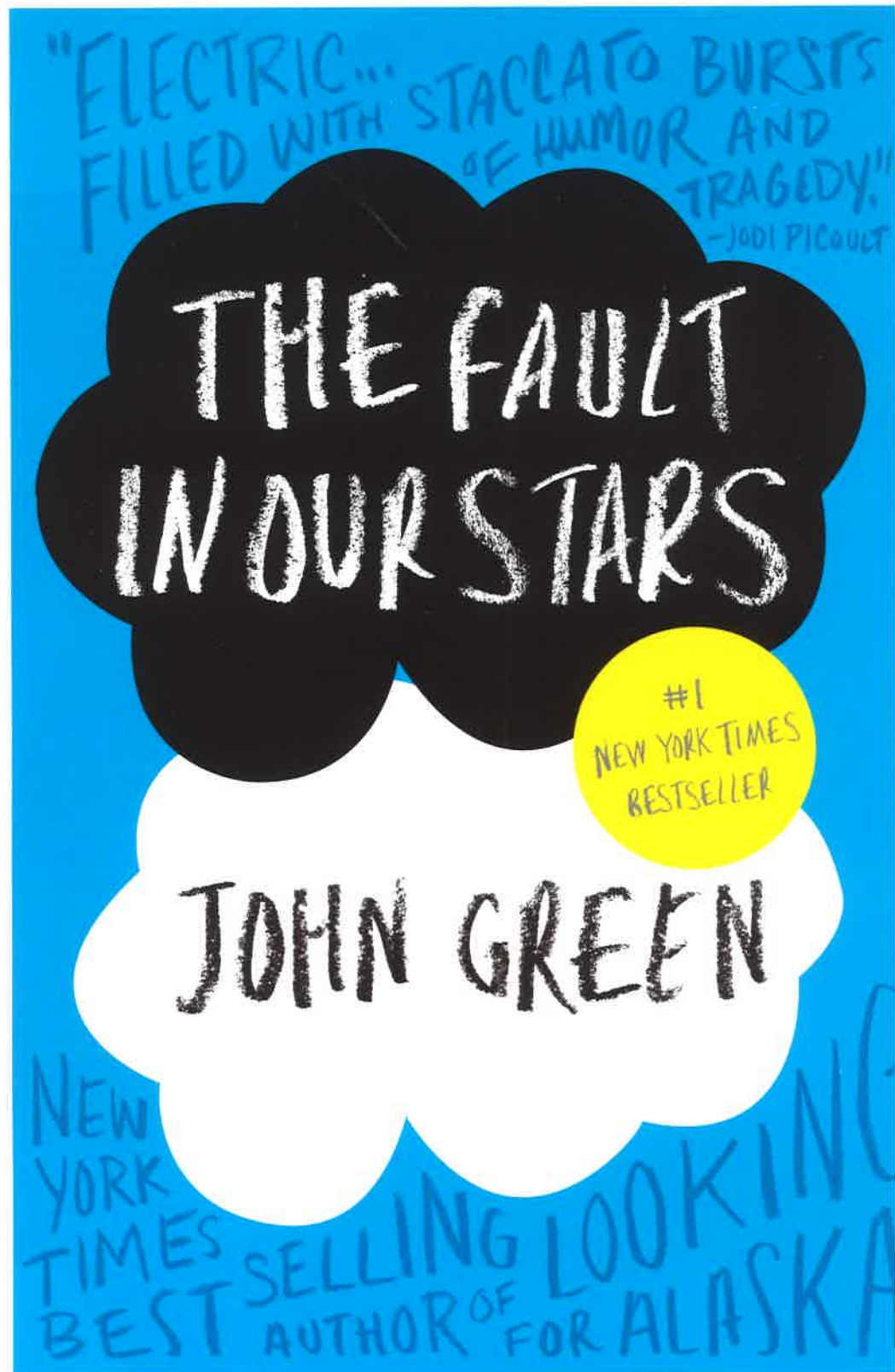
Death, dying and the end of bullshit. John Green invites us into the lives of the terminal cancer teen – and has no qualms showing the warts and all.

John Green is a master of young adult literature. He manages to be hilarious, current, philosophical and heartbreaking all at the same time. He writes prose that makes you want to savour every sentence, but constructs plots that will have you racing to the end. I'm a proud John Green fan and have adored his work ever since I read his debut, *Looking for Alaska*, a few years ago. But even I was surprised at how truly outstanding his latest work, *The Fault in Our Stars*, really is. There was huge hype surrounding its release; the book was moved forward due to demand and reached number one on Amazon months before it was due out. Often this sort of build-up can leave readers disappointed, but John has managed to exceed expectations.

The Fault in Our Stars is primarily a love story – the teenage characters, Hazel Lancaster and Augustus Waters, meet at a cancer support group. Although the disease is such a huge part of the story, John manages to deal with it expertly so that it never takes away from his characters. This is not a story about cancer, but of two teenagers who happen to have it.

Hazel is so perfectly constructed that I could vividly imagine her from the very first page. Her snarky humour, consideration for Augustus, and interactions with her parents were so real that I felt like I actually knew her. I have such affection for her and Augustus that I continue to think about them regularly, long after I finished reading the book. John Green writes the kind of fiction you tell your friends about, the kind of sentences you tape to your notice board, and the kind of characters you revisit when you want to be reminded how wonderful the world of young adult is.

Laura Jane Cassidy is author of *Angel Kiss*.



ROBERT DUNBAR

Although themes of death and dying have long been regular features of young adult fiction, it is only comparatively recently that they have begun to shed the mawkish sentimentality and reverential awe by which they were earlier conventionally characterised. John Green's remarkable novel, focusing on the story of two American teenagers with differing forms of terminal cancer, has no time for such bullshit, to use a word he himself frequently employs.

It is clear from the first time we encounter Hazel and Augustus at their cancer support group that this is not going to be yet another predictable 'cancer' novel, replete with noble and stoical responses to an illness which will eventually rob two young people of their lives. Rather, as Hazel, its narrator, expresses it in the closing pages, 'the problem is not suffering itself or oblivion itself but the depraved meaninglessness of these things, the absolutely inhuman nihilism of suffering'. In tracing the course of this 'meaninglessness' and 'nihilism', Green challenges his readers to confront a notion of death and dying which, paradoxically, sees them as an inevitable part of life, a life which, he insists, in spite of all its pain, discomfort and embarrassment, is to be savoured until its final moments.

The novel's greatest strength is that he succeeds in doing this not in a didactic, moralising manner but in a way which sees his narrative illuminated throughout by wit and humour, some of it at times of the darker variety. It may be that occasionally the wisecracking Hazel and Augustus are bright, perky and, above all, articulate to a degree that stretches their credibility, but their verbal sparring must be seen in the overall stylistic context of a novel which is itself highly literary and which, in a postmodern sort of way, raises interesting questions about the relationship between 'truth' and 'fiction'. There are enough intertextual references here to keep doctoral researchers occupied for decades, starting with the veiled Shakespearean allusion in the title and proceeding via Kierkegaard, TS Eliot and Maslow's hierarchy of needs to William Carlos Williams' 'Red Wheelbarrow' – with much else in between. 'You have a choice in this world, I believe, about how to tell sad stories,' says Hazel at one point, 'and we made the funny choice.' Green too has opted for the 'funny' – in more senses than one – but what a wealth of profundity is encompassed in his approach!

Robert Dunbar is a commentator on children's books and reading.

The Fault in Our Stars

John Green

Dutton, 2012

Hardback, 272pp

ISBN 9780525478812

PADDY O'DOHERTY

For someone generally quite punctual, I have to admit I am very late getting to read John Green. From the titles, covers and blurbs of his books over the years (and of course his vivacious online presence), I knew I was in for something special. Having just read *The Fault in Our Stars*, I am swooning with admiration and heading straight out to get his other books, which I plan to read in order of publication: *Looking for Alaska*, *An Abundance of Katherines* and *Paper Towns*.

John Green gives us an original, contemporary American teenage voice. He gives us characters that are real: troubled, perceptive, smart. He gives us, in the case of *The Fault in Our Stars*, a storyline that is ambitious, beautifully paced and heartbreaking. The story is told from Hazel's point of view. She is now 'thirty-three half-years old' and has been fighting thyroid cancer since she was 13. She has to trail an oxygen tank with her wherever she goes. She is depressed. Then she meets Augustus (Gus) at a support group meeting.

The dialogue is clever and laugh-out-loud (really) funny in places. Hazel's thoughts and feelings ring true as she and Gus get to know each other and their friendship and love grows. There is an interesting use of story and chapters as metaphor for life, and philosophy and poetry references are subtly woven throughout. (Less so with Maslow's hierarchy of needs which seemed stitched in with a darning needle.)

Hazel's relationship with her parents is brilliantly drawn – if occasionally a little too insightful and empathetic for a 16-year-old with, like, survival issues. Green gets both genders to a tee, from the boys' gaming, competitively 'pounding on their controllers', to Hazel's clothes awareness and general girliness. If you like stylish, perceptive and authentic writing, you will love this emotional, at-times-hilarious yet touchingly sad novel.

Paddy O'Doherty is a freelance editor and board member of CBI.

IT'S THE

LIGHT

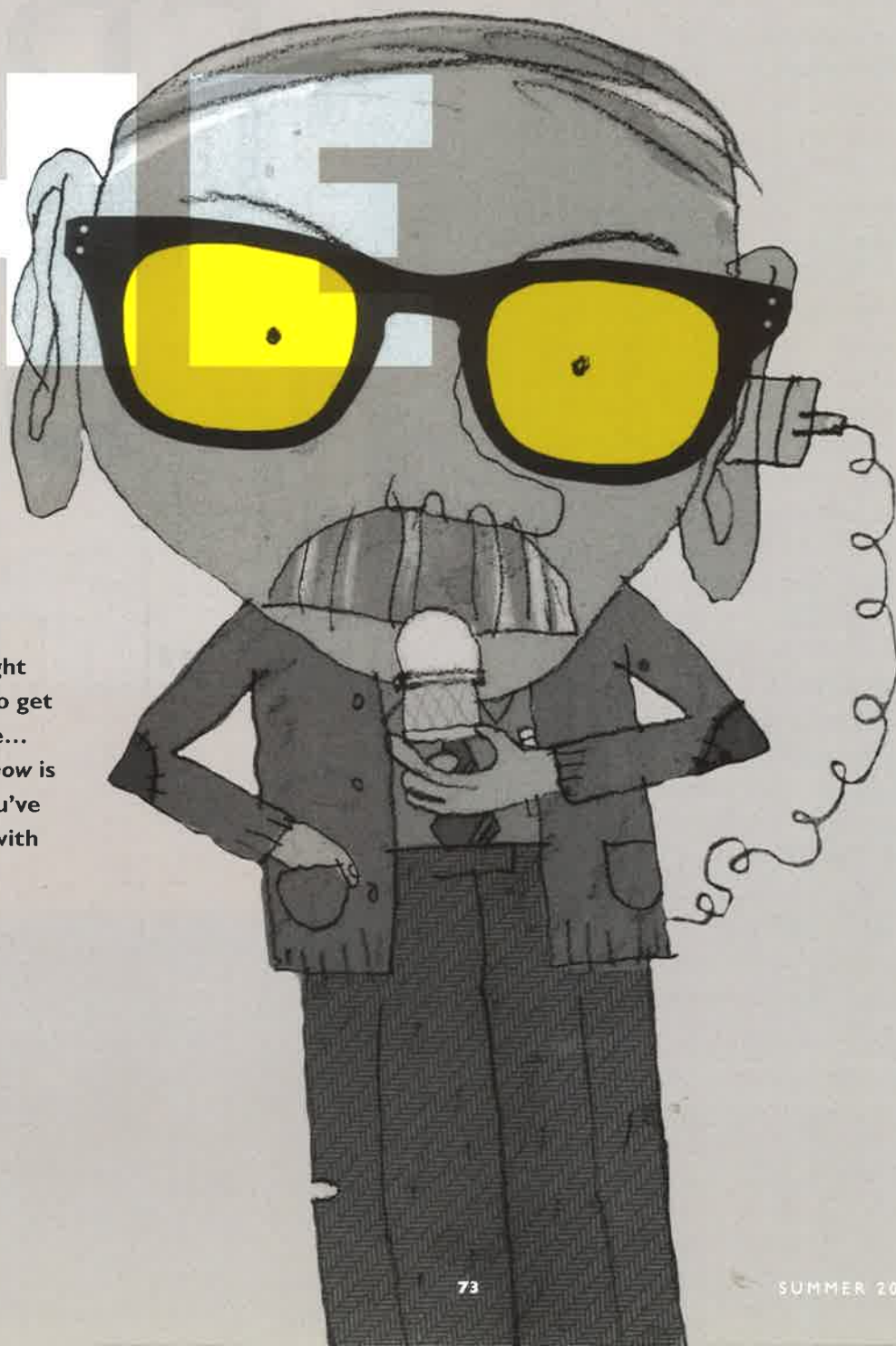
LIGHTS

ME TO

THE

S!

It's time to start the music, it's time to light the lights. It's time to get things started on the... no wait. *The Frank Show* is show and tell like you've never imagined it – with grandparents!



Sarah Webb

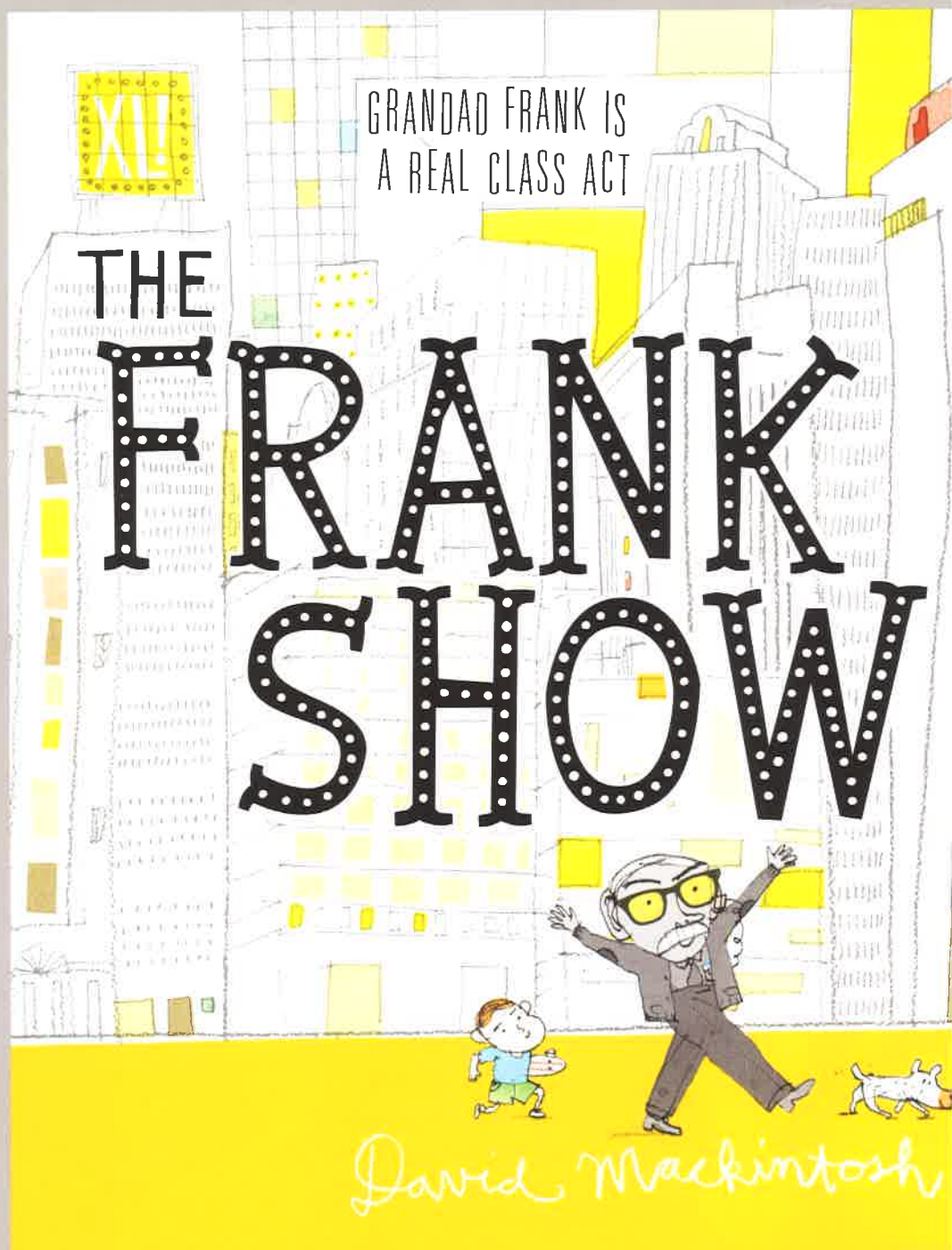
When I received David Mackintosh's *The Frank Show* in the post, I was so excited I danced around the kitchen. I adore his previous book, *Marshall Armstrong is New to Our School*, and this book is even better. From the stunning slipcover and endpapers to the book itself (all designed by Mackintosh), it's a stellar piece of work.

The strong, vivid and touching story concerns a boy who has to bring a family member into school for show and tell. Unfortunately, the only person available is his eccentric grandad, Frank, and the boy is horrified. Frank only likes old-fashioned things, eats pickled onion sandwiches and does not trust doctors or barbers. But Frank, with his army tales, his tattoo and the shrapnel lodged in his elbow is an unexpected hit with the class, making the boy a hero in the eyes of his peers.

The illustrations are extraordinary, wonderfully loose and expressive, each double-page spread a smorgasbord of original and inspiring images. It's all here – the decorated backgrounds and collage of Lauren Child, the serious-faced yet playful children of early Sendak, the loose pencil lines and stark matt colour of Bernard Waber (*Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*), but Mackintosh brings something new to the mix, a quirkiness and slightly black sense of humour that is all his own.

Like Shaun Tan, Mackintosh is an illustrator's illustrator, a true artist, clever, fearless and original, and I can't wait to see what he produces next. Mackintosh was longlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal, along with fellow Irish illustrators Chris Judge, Oliver Jeffers, Chris Haughton and Kevin Waldron. This, plus the news that Disney has just commissioned Brown Bag Films to turn Niamh Sharkey's *Hugglemonsters* into a preschool series, makes it truly a golden age for Irish illustration.

Sarah Melissa Charlotte Stanford Webb is
a writer and children's book reviewer.



The Frank Show

David Mackintosh

HarperCollins, 2012

Hardback, 32pp

ISBN 9780007364008



Nora Windeck

If you had to stand up in school and talk for a whole minute about one member of your family, would you want to talk about your grandad? The grandad who has a hearing aid and doesn't like anything? The carrot-topped protagonist of *The Frank Show* is faced with this very dilemma. All of his classmates have an interesting person to talk about and he only has old grandad Frank. But maybe old Frank is a little more interesting than he first thought...

David Mackintosh uses his illustrations, a combination of collages and faux-naïve drawings, to support the story of the unnamed narrator and his bespectacled grandad Frank. There are captivating details to discover on every page, making the book a real delight for any reader, and repeated readings are very satisfying.

While the premise, that an older generation can teach us more than we think, is a strong, positive message, to my mind Mackintosh

somewhat wastes the opportunity. All of Frank's funny eccentricities, his love for old records and his mistrust of doctors make him a rounded character, but in the narrator's eyes Frank only becomes 'cool' when he talks about war stories at the show-and-tell in school. In a colonial uniform with a tropical helmet, the bullets 'whistling around like African bees', Frank becomes the hero of the narrator's classmates, but what would a real multinational audience think?

Many classmates in the book are of other nationalities, so should or would they cheer for a colonial soldier? The inside jacket of the book shows a variety of items that seem to be from Frank's extensive exploits: an Italian coffee maker, an old film projector, a hunting gun, African masks, Russian dolls and a microscope. Any of these hold a story in itself, maybe one from which we could have learned something more positive.

Nora Windeck is a script developer and writer currently working on projects with the Irish Film Board and the Arts Council of Ireland.

Jennifer O'Sullivan

Due to a lack of exciting relatives, the boy in this story resigns himself to talk about his grandad Frank, whom he feels is extremely antiquated – or, in a word, 'boring' – especially in comparison to the other children in his class. They all seem to have much more fascinating relatives to discuss.

Mackintosh's vibrant and exciting visual text is a mixture of pen drawings and collage. His use of a muted colour palette ensures that the eye is drawn to the central characters in the foreground; however, there is plenty to keep the attention of the reader in the background also. For this reason, the picturebook will take rereadings. The visual text is supported by a witty, if overly long, verbal text.

Although a little predictable, *The Frank Show* typifies the adage that you should not judge a book by its cover, as Grandad turns out to be a lot more exciting than he is originally perceived.

Jennifer O'Sullivan is a primary school teacher living in Drogheda.

WEIGHING IN,



Poignant, honest and heartbreaking in places, *The Weight of Water* will have you treading through pages, sidestroking the spine and backstroking to stop yourself from reaching the end.

IN VERSE

CATHERINE ANN CULLEN

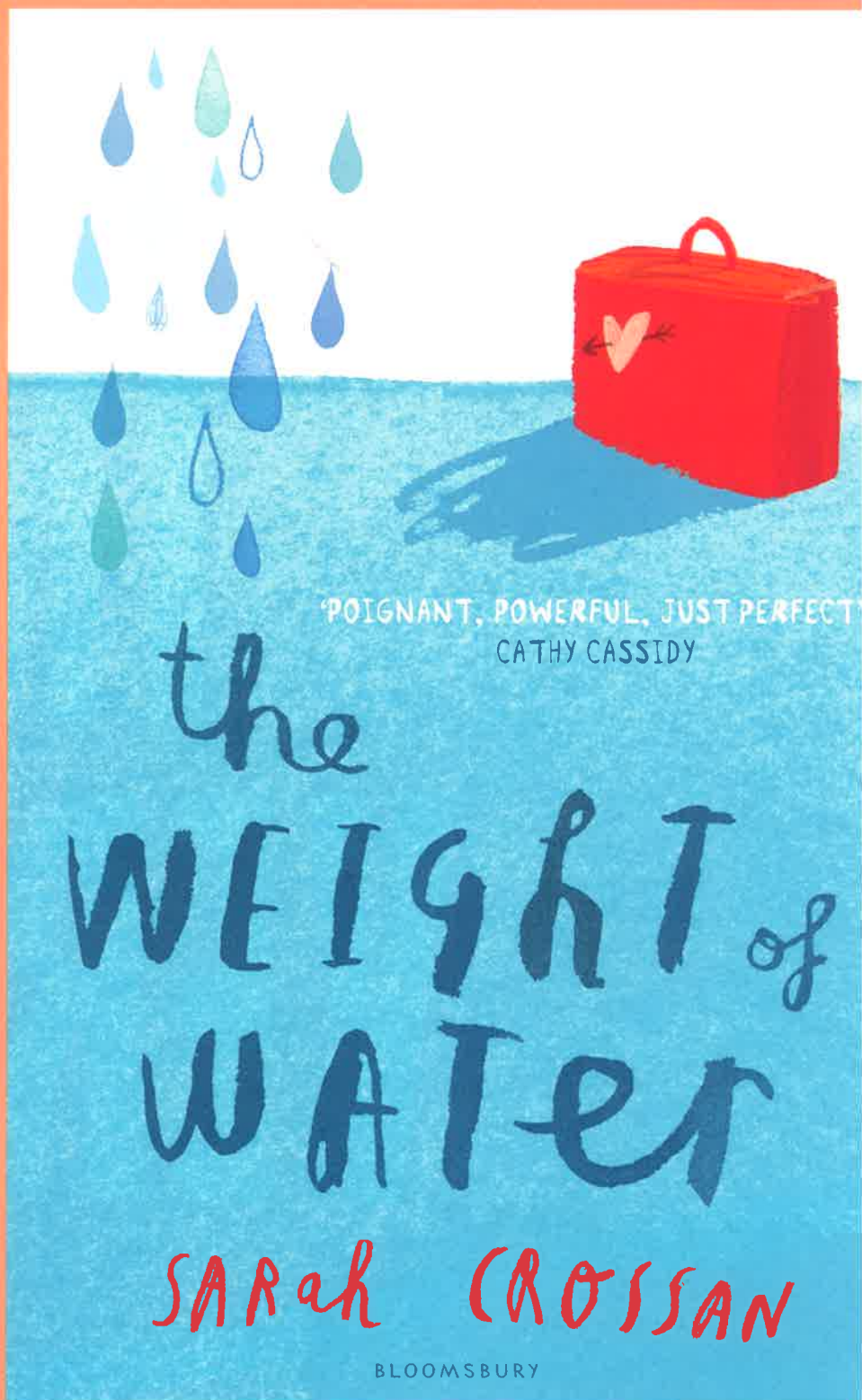
Kasienka is almost 13 when her father walks out on her mother and herself, taking 'all the good luggage'. Selfish Tata (that's Dad in Polish) takes two years to send a cheque, in an envelope clearly postmarked 'Coventry'. His wife and daughter drag their shabby bags to the English town in search of him.

The Weight of Water is written as a series of poems told in Kasienka's voice, of her life in an England that is colder to her than her homeland. At school she finds herself in Coventry, bullied by the vindictive Clair, while at home, depression means that Mama goes to sleep: 'Without saying goodnight/ Without turning off the light/ Without checking I'm alright.' When Kasienka finds Tata, she realises that the split between her parents is irreparable.

Kasienka is a fine swimmer and that talent becomes her saviour. First, there is the boy at the pool who watches her with interest, then there is her neighbour Kanoro who tells her that happiness should be her revenge on Clair. 'And though he is right/ It makes me feel worse/ Because I do not know/ How to be happy.' But she learns how, by throwing herself into competitive swimming – and William. While her mother sings *Madame Butterfly* at home, the opera of a woman abandoned, Kasienka is learning a new stroke, 'And I pull,/ Push,/ Recover:/ This is how the Butterfly works.'

The pages seem to turn themselves, so quickly you float through this tale of a butterfly swimmer emerging from her chrysalis. The book's ending is predictable, with Mama forming a tentative relationship with the only man we have met in the story besides Tata, but the gentle telling makes this, and some other slenderness of plot, more than forgivable.

Catherine Ann Cullen has published two picturebooks and is writing a children's novel.



The Weight of Water
Sarah Crossan

Bloomsbury, 2012
Hardback, 240pp
ISBN 9781408823002

JANE MITCHELL

This slim and rather beautiful little volume tells the story of 13-year-old Polish immigrant Kasienka as she arrives in England with her mother, a broken suitcase and an old laundry bag, in search of her father, who has left the family.

Novels in free verse are neither poetry nor prose, but instead occupy some strange place in between, and I'm always a little wary of them. However, this work absorbed me entirely. The sparse writing means that the focus is wholly on the essential moments in Kasienka's lonely introduction to a new school, her impoverished existence sharing a single room and bed with her mother and her heartbreaking experience of bullying. There is little room for extraneous description or whimsical departures into subplots. The lyrical verses are laconic, capturing perfectly Kasienka's confusion, doubt and unhappiness. They sit independently on the pages, yet are linked to create a powerful story that moves smoothly from one event to the next.

For such a brief work, characterisation still manages to be strong and well rounded. It is easy to warm to and empathise with Kasienka, while the other characters, Kanoro, Tata and her mother, are believable and true. The novel's antagonist, Clair, is strong and authentic, while William, the origin of Kasienka's fledgling confidence, occupies enough space for us to see his importance in her heart.

Ultimately, this tale is one of hope, courage and redemption. With the support of the people around her, Kasienka finds her own strength and ultimately she triumphs. This is an important book for the themes it tackles, but also entirely enjoyable and even a touch magical in its own right.

Jane Mitchell is an award-winning author of books for children and young people.

It is unusual and unexpected to be presented with a young adult book written in verse – and even more unusual and unexpected not to be disappointed by it. Although this novel is presented as a collection of poems, it blurs the line between poetry and prose. It reads as a novel and the reader can be excused for skipping over the title of each poem to race through the story.

Crossan's writing is accessible, honest and unpretentious, and her honesty, drawing the reader in, is the most moving element of the novel. Kasienka examines her own flaws, selfishness, and that in itself makes her a stronger, more admirable character. You are forced into her shoes and her unflinching insight into her own life and the lives of others.

The Weight of Water could be accused of lacking action or plot, possibly due to the style in which it is written. This does not however take away from the novel itself; instead the text moves with great pace, and the missing 'action' emphasises the bleakness, mundanity and isolation at times. In a way, the novel can be treated as snapshot scenes, where the reader fills in the gaps. By leaving the novel open to so much suggestion, while intimating at what might have happened, this makes it all the more powerful, as the story becomes reliant on the tone, and the tone resonates with emotion.

More than anything, this book is insightful and heartbreaking. With its sparse language, and at times matter-of-fact narrative, it provokes

a response from the reader. The sparsity of language does not romanticise or dramatise the situation. However, when more emotive language is used, it is more poignant. The language therefore reflects the intensity of Kasienka's feelings. Just as her language develops and becomes more sophisticated, her feelings and emotions too become more intense.

The relationship between language and water underpins the entire novel; the presence of water in its different forms becomes both cleansing and suffocating, but ultimately is a space for escapism. Kasienka has a dichotomous relationship with water: she feels a sense of belonging there but also its potential violence. It is a curious title, *The Weight of Water*, with Crossan's depiction of water as both cleansing and as an escape. The title also describes it as a burden, depicting life in both an oppressive and uplifting way.

No reader can ignore the cover, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers, nor the text, printed in blue. The presentation of the words sustains the representation of water, as well as its aesthetic appeal, but hopefully the characteristic Jeffers cover will give the book a wider readership than I fear it will have. *The Weight of Water* is a beautiful surprise of a book. Like the weight of water itself, it stirs the soul but leaves the reader with a fresh perspective of hope. It has a water-like synergy, a story of dignity, fused with a sense of buoyancy and colour.

Carrie Anderson is a children's bookseller with Waterstones, Belfast.

BEIRT BHUACHAILLÍ 'S BOSCA



TWO BOYS AND A BOX

Scéal a ghoinfidh do spéis i vaimpíri
ár linne – *Ailfí agus an Vaimpír*.

Get your fangs into *Ailfí* agus an
Vaimpír, a modern day vampire.

CLAIRE MARIE DUNNE

Leabhar eile ó pheann Orna Ní Choileáin agus ní fad go mbeidh ceann eile againn mar is léir ón deireadh a fhágtar ar crochadh píosa. Meascán den domhan comhaimseartha agus den domhan osnádúrtha atá sa scéal seo ach nasctar na téamaí coitianta teaghlaigh agus cairdis atá iontu. Idir Skype agus an iPad, idir ialtóg agus mhuince gairleoige, tá ábhar sa scéal seo a bhaineann le saol an duine óig sa lá atá inniu ann mar aon le blaiseadh a thabhairt ar dhomhan na vaimpíri sa 21ú haois.

Mar a léiríonn teideal ar chlúdach adhfhuafar an úrscéil, insítear formhór an scéil tríd an idirphlé a bhíonn sa chairdeas neamhghnách seo idir Ailfí, an príomhcharachtar, agus Marius an vaimpír. Déantar codarsnacht léargasach idir na pleananna cuimsitheacha a cheapann Ailfí agus a chara vaimpíre, na comhráite bríocha a bhíonn acu chun réiteach a fháil ar chruachás na vaimpíre, agus an easpa cumarsáide agus tost iomlán in amanna i dteaghlach Ailfí maidir le ceist a mháthar.

Agus greann dubh fite fuaite san úrscéal seo, cuirtear dúshlán rompu go minic ár ndearcadh i leith daoine (beo, marbha agus neamh-mharbha) a leasú in amanna macasamhail an seanfhocal 'ná tabhair breithiúnas ar an gcéad amharc'. Oiriúnach do dhéagóirí óga (11–14 bliain).

Leabhar den scoth is ea an leabhar úrnua seo atá curtha faoin ár mbráid ag Orna Ní Choileáin, scríbhneoir an cnuasaigh gearrscéalta *Canary Wharf* a foilsíodh i 2009. Bhain mé fíor-shult agus taitneamh as an leabhar corraitheach seo agus mé ag leanúint turais Ailfí agus an vaimpír Marius agus iad ar thóir chónra! Mar is eol do chách, tá suim ollmhór ag páistí an lae inniu i saol na vaimpírí agus is meascán den leabhar *Dracula* agus an tsraith *Twilight* le Stephenie Meyer atá sa leabhar seo, dar liom, ach le casadh greannmhar.

Is saothar fíor-oiriúnach do dhéagóirí atá ann agus is minic a déantar tagairtí do théarmaíocht an-nua-aimseartha, mar shampla, an iPad, Facebook agus tae luibhe! Cuirtear Gaeilge soléite ós ar gcomhair agus is iontach áisiúil an gluais atá ar fáil ag deireadh an leabhair. Thaitin an clúdach go mór liom chomh maith le leagan amach agus stíl na clóscríbhneoireachta.

Luaigh mé cheana féin go bhfuil greann ag baint leis an scéal seo agus is cinnte gurb é seo ceann de na buanna is mó atá ag baint leis. Seachas dúil san fhuil a bheith ag an Vaimpír áirithe seo, rollóga figí is mó a bhfaigheann sé blas orthu. Is mór an sásamh a fuair mé as críoch an scéil; críoch nach mbeifí ag súil leis. Is breá le páistí sraitheanna scéalta agus a bheith ag tnúth leis an gcéad ceann eile. Mar sin, bhí áthas orm a léamh go leanfar den sraith seo sa toadhchá. Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil mé féin ag tnúth go mór leo chomh maith.

Another book from Orna Ní Choileáin's pen and it won't be long again until we have another, judging by the slightly open ending of the book. A mix of contemporary living and the supernatural world links the common themes of family and friends in both. From Skype to iPads, and bats to garlic necklaces, the story resonates with today's youths as well as giving a taste of 21st-century vampires.

As the title on the macabre cover suggests, the story is told mostly through the dialogue in an unusual friendship between Ailfí, the protagonist, and Marius the vampire. An insightful contrast is made between the comprehensive plans that Ailfí and Marius devise as well as the meaningful conversations they have to address Marius's predicament, and the lack of communication and complete silence at times in Ailfí's home regarding his mother's condition.

With its black humour carefully woven into the storyline, we are regularly called to question and amend our perceptions of people (alive, dead and undead) and not to judge a book by its cover. Suitable for young teenagers (11–14 years).

Claire Marie Dunne is the Irish language editor with *Inis Magazine*.

Ailfí agus an Vaimpír is an excellent work written by Orna Ní Choileáin, writer of *Canary Wharf*, a collection of short stories published in 2009. I thoroughly enjoyed following Ailfí and his vampire friend Marius on their journey to find a coffin! With some years now, literature based on vampires and their characteristics has become increasingly popular and it is fantastic that Ní Choileáin has made this genre available to readers of the Irish language too. A mixture of both *Dracula* and the *Twilight* series is what comes to mind when reading this story, although Ní Choileáin adds an amusing twist of her own.

A book highly appropriate for teenagers, modern terminology is often used, e.g. the iPad, Facebook and herbal tea! Ní Choileáin's writing is rich in language yet also extremely reader friendly. An added glossary attached to the back of the book is both helpful and practical. Both the cover and blurb of the novel are immensely enticing, along with the overall style and print layout of the work.

As I mentioned before, Ní Choileáin brings an added sense of humour to this story and this is most definitely one of its strengths. Instead of the natural desire for blood which vampires are said to possess, this particular vampire would rather indulge in a packet of fig rolls. I thoroughly enjoyed the ending of the story – quite unpredictable. Most children love books that appear as a series, the excitement of waiting for the next part being central to the excitement. As a result, I was delighted to read that this series will be continued in the future. I must admit that I am looking forward to the next one already.

Freda Ní Mhuileann is a primary school teacher from Cobh.



De bhunadh Chorcaí í Orna Ní Choileáin ach tá cónaí uirthi anois i mBaile Átha Cliath. Bhí an-ráchairt ar a céad chnuasach gearrscéalta *Canary Wharf* a d'fhoilsigh Cois Life sa bhliain 2009. Is *Ailfí agus an Vaimpír* do pháistí óga idir 11 agus 14 bliain d'aois. Déantar cur síos ar imeachtaí Ailfí agus Marius agus iad ag lorg cónra nua don vaimpír óg. Fágtar Marius agus Ailfí go sona sásta nuair a éiríonn le hAilfí áit chónaithe a aimsiú don vaimpír.

Tá an-spéis ag Ní Choileáin i ndomhan na vaimpírí agus éiríonn léi vaimpír nua-aoiseach a chruthú in intinn an léitheora. Baintear úsáid as íomhánna nua-aimseartha i rith an scéil: 'Seomra díchéadfaihte, Skype, cónra deluxe' agus éiríonn léi domhan an aonú aois is fiche a nascadh le traidisiún na vaimpírí ar bhealach an-éifeachtach. Tá an-tóir ar na vaimpírí i scéalaíocht an pháiste le cúpla bliain anuas. D'éirigh go hiontach leis an tsraith scéalta *Twilight* a chruthaigh Stephenie Meyer. Cuireann línte den sórt seo: 'Bhí lámh Marius fuar. Cnámhach, Allasúil...' agus 'Tá athruithe tagtha ar ár gcorp le himeacht ama. Ní bhíonn an oiread céanna dúile againn in ábhar coimhthíoch is a bhíodh thráth...' Edward Cullen ón tsraith *Twilight* i gcuimhne don léitheoir.

Tá leagan amach an téacs soiléir do léitheoirí óga na Gaeilge. Tá 22 caibidil san iomlán agus baineann an t-údar úsáid as réimse foclóra a bhfuil dúshlán ag baint leis. Cuireadh gluais isteach leis an leabhar chun tacaíocht a chur ar fáil don fhoghlaimeoir óg. Is mór an chabhair í seo don fhoghlaimeoir a léann sa bhaile leis féin. D'fhéadfadh an múinteoir ranga an ghluais a úsáid don ionchur teanga sna ceachtanna seachas an t-aistriúchán sin a chur ar fáil do na páistí.

Fágtar an léitheoir ag deireadh an scéil agus é ag iarraidh níos mó eolais a fháil amach faoi eachtraí a bhaineann leis an vaimpír óg seo. An chéad leabhar eile a thiocfaidh ó pheann an údair seo ná *Vaimpír san Áiléar* agus beidh mé súil go mór leis.

Orna Ní Choileáin is originally from Cork but now lives in Dublin. There was a huge demand for her first collection of short stories, *Canary Wharf*, which Cois Life published in 2009. *Ailfí agus an Vaimpír*, her first children's book, is suitable for 11–14-year-olds. The author describes Marius and Ailfí's adventures during a quest to find a new coffin for the young vampire. They successfully complete their task when they manage to find a new homeplace for Marius.

Ní Choileáin has a deep interest in the world of vampires and she succeeds in creating a modern vampire for the reader. She uses contemporary imagery during the story, 'Seomra díchéadfaihte, Skype, cónra deluxe', and manages to successfully connect the 21st-century world with the vampire tradition. There has been a phenomenal demand for vampire stories amongst the young in recent years. Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series was very successful and there are certain lines in this book that are reminiscent of Edward Cullen from that series: 'Bhí lámh Marius fuar. Cnámhach, Allasúil...' and 'Tá athruithe tagtha ar ár gcorp le himeacht ama. Ní bhíonn an oiread céanna dúile againn in ábhar coimhthíoch is a bhíodh thráth...'

The layout of the text is very clear for young readers of Irish fiction. There are 22 chapters and the author uses a range of challenging vocabulary during the story. A glossary of terms is available with the book in order to support the young learner. This provides valuable help for the child who is reading alone at home, while a class teacher could use the glossary when planning the language input for Gaeilge lessons instead of providing this translation for the children.

The reader is left wanting to find out more about the adventures of this young vampire. The next book to come from the hands of this author is *Vaimpír san Áiléar* and I'm very much looking forward to it.

Máire Nic an Bhaird is a lecturer in Irish language and literature at Froebel College of Education, in association with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

Ailfí agus an Vaimpír
Orna Ní Choileáin

Cois Life, 2012
Bogchlúdach, 124pp
ISBN 9781907494208

Fantasy collides with the western in the second volume of the Will Gallows series. Another action-packed adventure echoing the tones of Eoin Colfer and Derek Landy.





Illustration © Jonny Duddle

CLAIRE HENNESSY

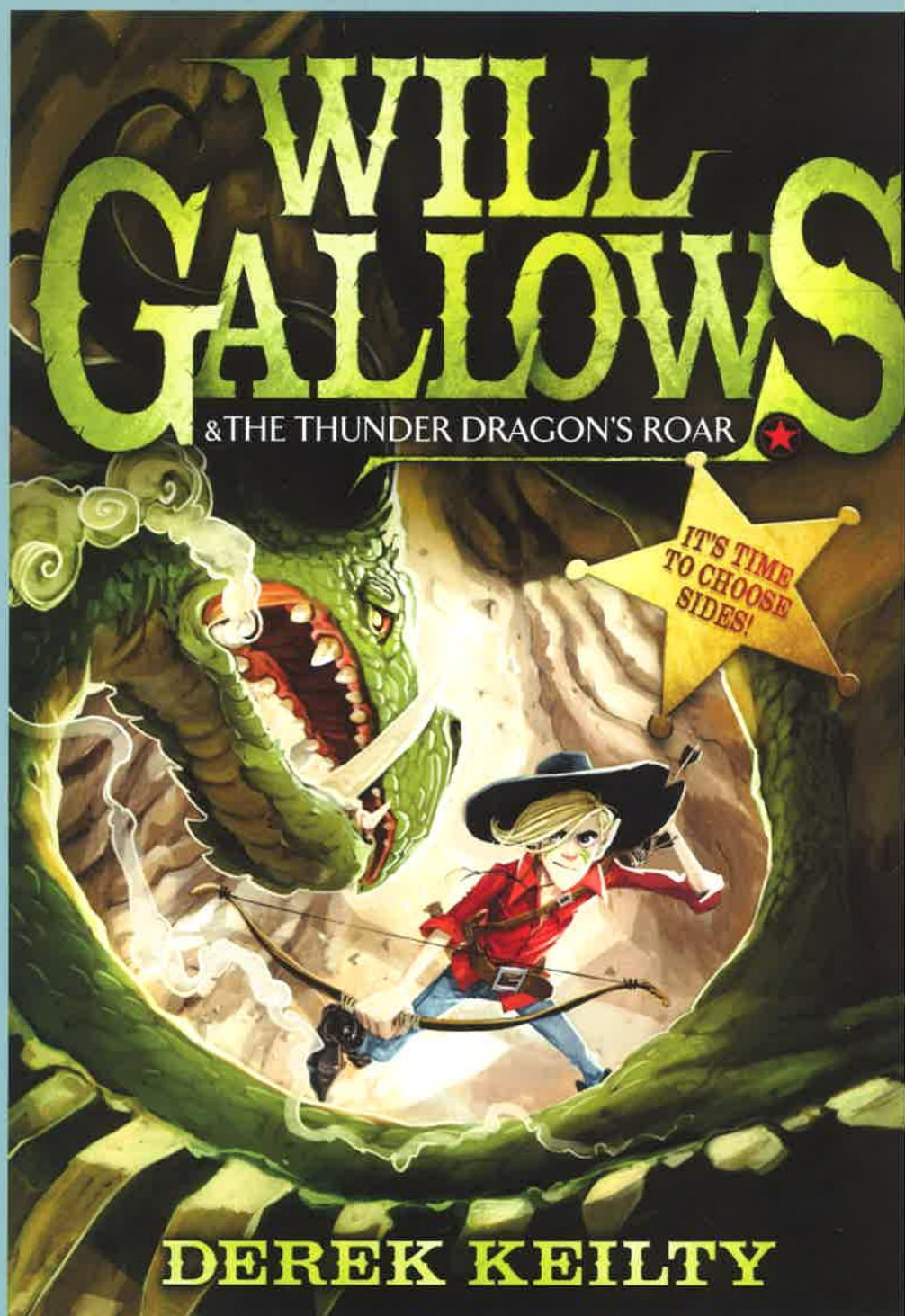
Fantasy collides with the western in the second volume of the Will Gallows series. The title character, half-human and half-elf, inhabits a world of cowboys – albeit sky cowboys – and sheriffs, as well as Native American-inspired elves and mages. As tensions grow between cowboys and elves, Will uncovers a sinister plot and things get worse when his uncle is wrongfully imprisoned. There is plenty of drama and action to keep the reader interested, and the last one hundred pages or so are particularly gripping, as disasters and crises pile up.

The frontier-style dialogue is handled well – ‘reckon’ and ‘ain’t’ are sprinkled plentifully throughout, with the characters’ voices easy to hear. At times, Will’s first-person narration veers a little towards the formal, however, and the background about the world and different kinds of magic is sometimes delivered in a clunky manner. Readers may find some of the dialogue – for example, discussions about a plan to destroy a forest – slightly preachy.

Will’s goodness and courage make him an excellent action hero but at times difficult to relate to. The moments where he gets a taste of what the darker side of elf magic might be like to experience are among the most interesting in terms of character insight, but as a potential flaw, it’s given as much space as his concern that he might have a silly tribe name bestowed upon him.

The genre blending is interesting, and lends itself to some clever inventions – the term ‘snake-bellied’ sounds suitably Wild West but also refers to an actual snake-bellied troll, for example. Readers looking for something that brings a new dimension to the traditional fantasy quest are likely to enjoy this, and get caught up in the adventure.

Claire Hennessy is the author of nine novels for young adults and is currently working on her next book.



**Will Gallows and the
Thunder Dragon's Roar**
Derek Keilty

Andersen Press, 2012
Paperback, 288pp
ISBN 9781849393287



KEITH O'SULLIVAN

In this, the second instalment of the Will Gallows series, Derek Keilty's eponymous hero battles to save his uncle from the hangman's noose for a crime he did not commit. In the process, he also becomes involved in a feud between the cowboy settlers of the eastern arm of the West Rock and the elf 'braves' of Gung-Choux village.

While the thematic presentation of the battles between the forces of good and evil is somewhat simplistic, the characterisation is generally interesting and captivating. Perhaps Keilty's greatest strength as a writer, though, lies in his ability to blend the generic conventions of fantasy and Western seamlessly.

All in all, *Will Gallows and the Thunder Dragon's Roar* is the creation of a natural storyteller: long may the narrative continue.

Keith O'Sullivan is lecturer in English at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

KIERAN MARK CROWLEY

Derek Keilty's book is an entertaining adventure story set in a world that is both recognisable and very odd at the same time. Will Gallows is a young elfling sky cowboy living in an unstable environment filled with an assortment of humans and more exotic creatures. He has enough on his plate trying to get his stubborn grandmother to move from her unsafe house when his beloved uncle is arrested for a crime he did not commit. Will has to solve the mystery of who framed him if he is to prevent a dreadful war taking place between the elves and the pale-face settlers, who have some nasty vermins in their ranks.

The novel mixes the western and fantasy genres, and does so in a way that never grates or seems forced. While Keilty draws upon the familiar tropes of the western films and books, the moment you feel like you are in the world of John Wayne and James Stewart up pops a dragon or a goblin to remind you that this is a very different place.

The story rattles along and is very well constructed. But what stands out are the vividly drawn characters – Imelda Hyde and Hox Swillet in particular – which the writer manages to create swiftly, but in an unforced manner. These characters are enhanced by some excellent black and white drawings throughout the book.

Although it is an action-packed story, Keilty still manages to weave in issues of family loyalty and identity, immigration, land rights and the freedom to live life as you choose. Overall, *The Thunder Dragon's Roar* is an enjoyable second book in the series.

Kieran Mark Crowley is a Cork-based writer for children.

Jasper and the Green Marvel is a sequel to Madden's *Snakes' Elbows*, her first children's book and winner of the Eilís Dillon Award in 2006. The republication of *Snake's Elbows* and the release of *Jasper* gives new readers the chance to catch up with the strange goings-on in Woodford.

OLD HA-BATS DIE HARD

MÉLANIE MCGILLOWAY

The prospect of finding a long lost and very valuable emerald necklace called the Green Marvel is enough to persuade villainous Jasper Jellit to take on a job as gardener in Haverford-Snuffley Hall, even though he is quite frankly allergic to work and knows nothing about flowers or vegetables. However, nothing has prepared him to tackle a suspicious cook, some very clever bats and even a ghost before he can get his mucky hands on the treasure.

Jasper and his two pet rats, Rags and Bags, are quite simply nasty and grubby. In the best Dahl tradition and with habits reminiscent of the Twits, the trio's outrageous behaviour provides plenty of entertainment in this tale, a sequel to *Snakes' Elbows*, although, it is not necessary to have read it to enjoy this new adventure. Young readers will certainly relish their antics. But while Jasper's unrepentant behaviour goes from bad to worse, we witness the slow transformation of Rags and Bags, who are shown the error of their ways by a bonnet-wearing bat. As you can see, it is all a bit wacky, with a heavy dose of whimsy, but this story really is a lot of fun.

The mystery around the Green Marvel keeps the plot going and exciting, and the storyline provides some genuine laugh-out-loud moments (including the sad flute incident and Mrs Haverford-Snuffley's inclination for far-fetched cutesy names for her pets). Young audiences will also be kept engrossed by the anticipation of whether Jasper will get his comeuppance. And though children love a villain, I am sure even they will be relieved that good manners and kindness prevail eventually and that Jasper ends up where he started.

A cracking and light read which will appeal equally to boys and girls from 8 upwards.

Mélanie McGilloway is a school librarian and blogger at librarymice.com

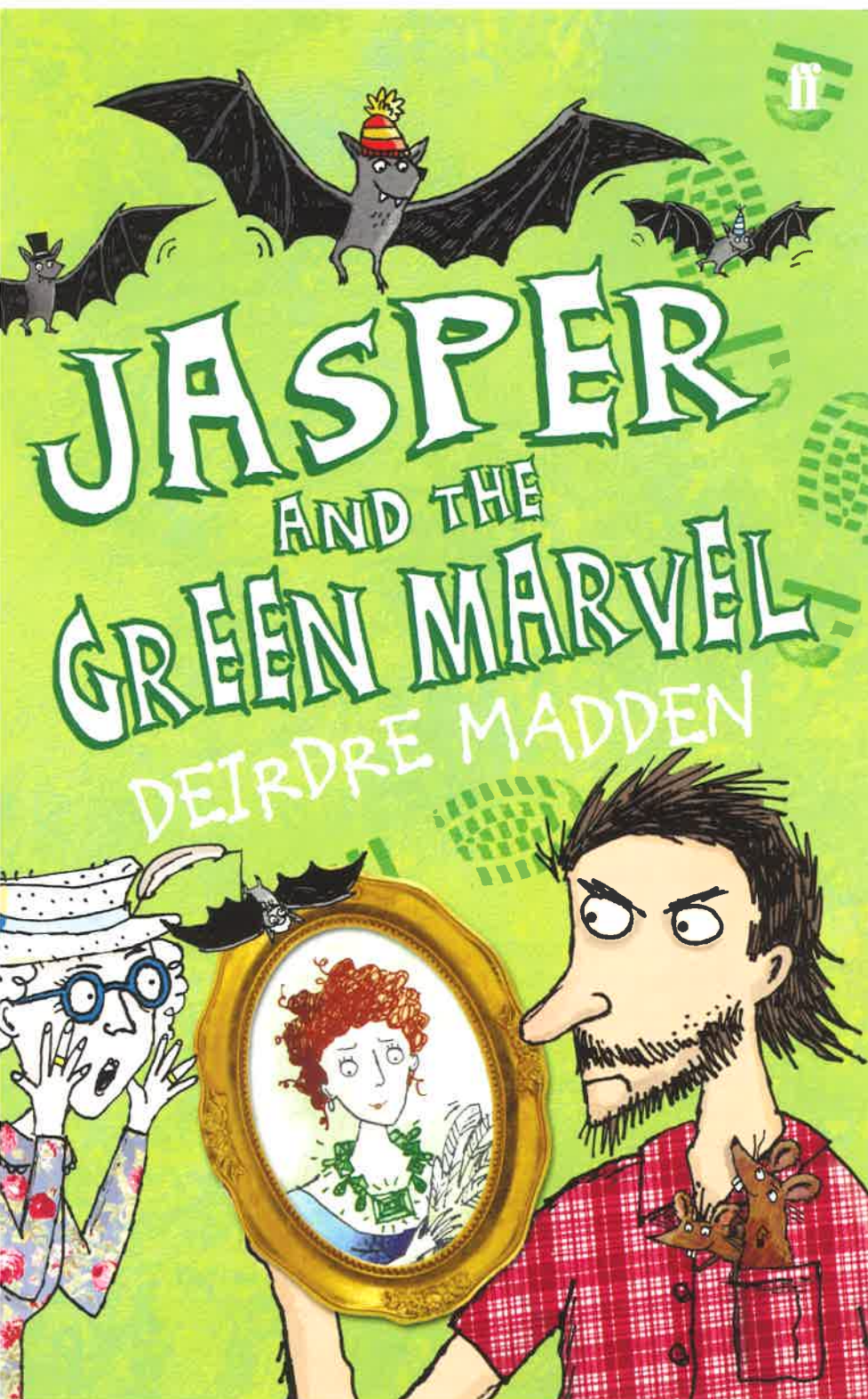
HELEN CORCORAN

Deirdre Madden continues Jasper's adventures in Woodford, following *Snake's Elbows*. Now free from prison after his misadventures detailed in the first book, Jasper, down on his luck and completely broke, becomes the gardener of Haverford-Snuffley Hall to search for the emerald necklace known as The Green Marvel supposedly hidden and lost there. Of course nothing ever goes to plan for Jasper, but can his efforts really be thwarted by a bat and two rats teamed up with a ghost?

Madden continues her successful formula, in this case the cat and two dogs being replaced by a bat and two rats. The tone is reminiscent of Roald Dahl in parts, with sarcastic and knowing humour, along with the narrator often directly addressing the reader, but the theme and plot are not particularly dark, unlike some of Dahl's work. The characters are humorous yet flawed, and the inclusion of a quest in the rats' narrative, with the addition of a ghost's subplot, keeps the pages turning until the hilarious conclusion.

It is quickly established that no knowledge of the prior book is necessary to understand this one, but the hints of the previous book are so tantalising that sometimes it feels like they should be expanded upon. They will ensure that *Snakes' Elbows* is quickly purchased and read. Faber and Faber choosing to release the first two books together hopefully means there will be future volumes, likely to continue with Jasper as the connecting link.

Helen Corcoran works as a bookseller and writer,



Jasper and the Green Marvel
Deirdre Madden

Faber and Faber, 2012
Paperback, 208pp
ISBN 9780571260072

MALACHY DOYLE

For a book without a single child character, Deirdre Madden has fashioned a wonderfully child-friendly story. For a book with an evil-hearted villain as its main protagonist, it is in fact a treatise on kindness.

Jasper and the Green Marvel is a sequel to *Snakes' Elbows*, her first children's book and winner of the Eilís Dillon Award in 2006. Faber and Faber, publisher of Madden's work for adults, have republished *Snakes' Elbows* alongside the new novel, giving us the chance to read both together (although the sequel works perfectly well as a standalone too). It tells the highly enjoyable tale of the villainous Jasper Jellit, newly released from jail who, accompanied by his pet rats, Rags and Bags, talks his way into a job as gardener at Haverford-Snuffley Hall, in the hope of finding the long-lost Green Marvel – a highly prized emerald necklace.

With a cast of ghosts, rats, bats and humans, and a bunch of riddles to solve before we can get anywhere near a happy ending, Madden has a whale of a time entertaining the reader, while remaining constantly warm-hearted. Her dialogue fizzles with fun, especially when dealing with the animal-mad (and particularly bat-mad) Mrs Haverford-Snuffley.

The book is easy to read, yet totally uncondescending in its vocabulary. At the end, Jasper, of course, gets his comeuppance, but Madden promises us further adventures if and when 'he's up to his old tricks again'. Let's hope it doesn't take another seven years.

Malachy Doyle is an award-winning author.

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

In a world devastated by climate change, water levels have risen, parts of the Earth have been rendered uninhabitable by the sun, and Ireland has become a temperate home for millions of refugees. *Valentina* is something you don't come across very often: a science-fiction novel set in Ireland.

BOB BURKE

Valentina has grown up in the Green Zone, an area of the country where the privileged few live and your position in society is determined by how much money you have. After meeting new arrivals, Pippa and Damian, Valentina's world is turned upside-down when she's forced to leave the comfort of the Green Zone and see the world outside as it really is.

The story is dystopian science fiction by numbers. Valentina's journey follows the tropes of the genre and, as a result, much of what happens is predictable and there is very little by way of surprise as the narrative progresses. There's a strange mix of characters that vary between those that are well developed (the three batty ladies living in a former stately home on the edge of the Green Zone) and those that never develop beyond being ciphers (the refugee Joshua and Valentina's brother John).

What saves the story, however, is the character of Valentina herself. Privileged and sheltered but with a cynical and off-beat attitude, her never-less-than-compelling voice drives the story forward, making a conventional tale very readable and entertaining all the way through to the abrupt and seemingly rushed final chapter.

Valentina isn't a bad novel; it just lacks that spark of originality that could have transformed it from being a conventional science fiction story into something really special.

Bob Burke is an award-winning writer for children.

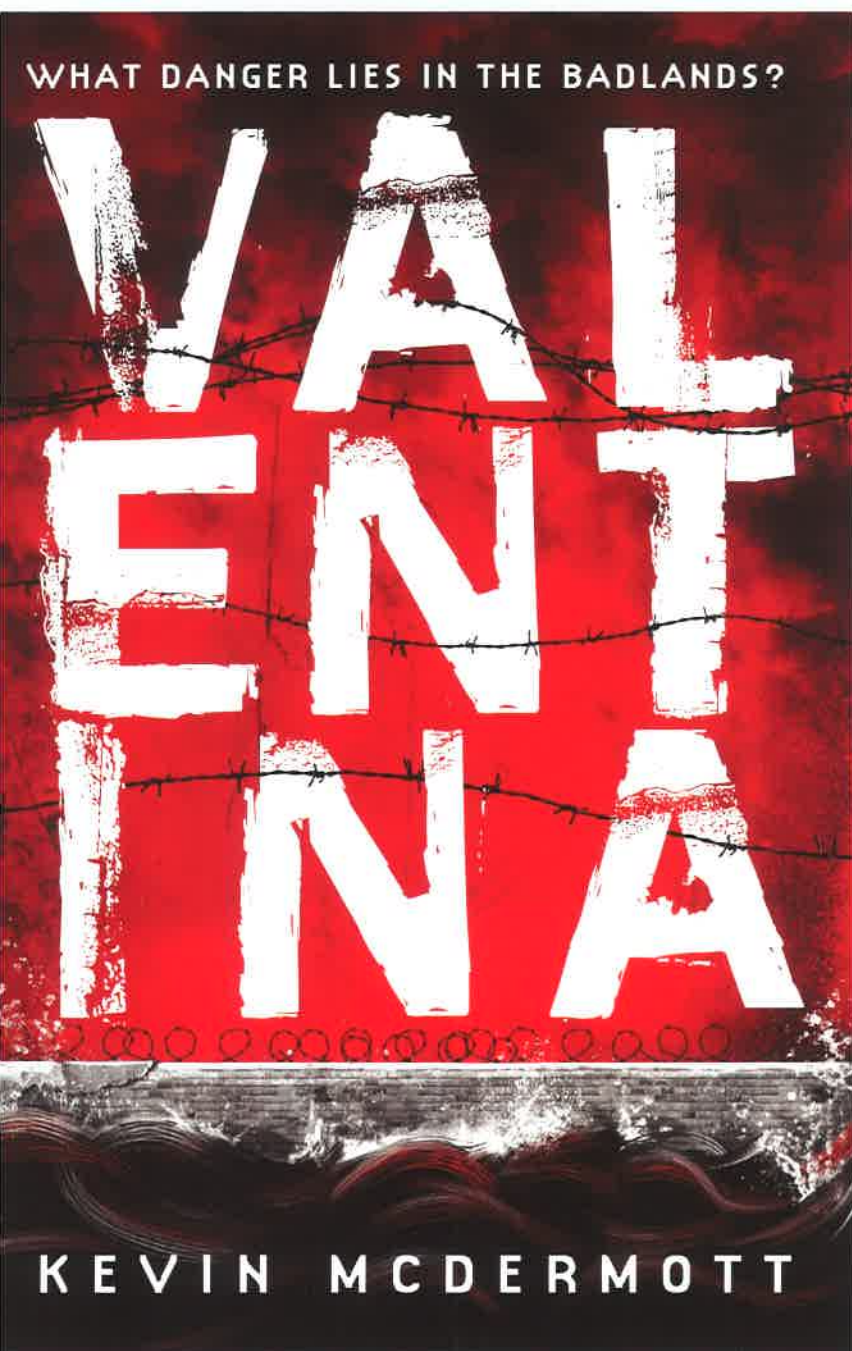
IRENE BARBER

Valentina, the young teenage narrator of this coming-of-age novel, is opinionated, self-centred, intelligent, witty and well read. She is the most attractive aspect of this book. She really is a D4 (OMG!) in thin disguise. The voice is authentic and will strike a chord with teenage readers. Her strained relationship with her mother and her admiration for her father are well told, and her combination of vulnerability and arrogance when dealing with her schoolmates is realistic.

When Valentina moves out of her comfort zone and into real danger, we expect her to 'get real'. She does not and her voice, which was originally funny, has now become somewhat irritating and impedes the fluency of the story. She leaves her ridiculously privileged life to visit her older brothers, one in an eco-settlement and the other working as a political activist. On her second journey, Valentina is kidnapped but survives and returns somewhat older and wiser and with breasts!

This ambitious and intriguing novel incorporates many topical issues within the narrative: global warming, terrorism, inequality, mass immigration and personal responsibility.

Irene Barber is a teacher in Sandford Parish National School, Dublin.



Valentina
Kevin McDermott

Little Island, 2012
Paperback, 272pp
ISBN 9781908195203

JUDY POMEROY

Three hundred Elite families, living in the Citadel, are protected from the civil unrest caused by the lack of land. The story tells of a young Elite girl's foray into the other 'zones' where life is not so organised or safe. It tells of her growth from naivety to the stark realisation of what is happening beyond the media silence.

It was a surprise to realise that the story is set in Ireland. I had thought the setting to be some fantasy or alternative universe. But once the setting had been established, it then became very obvious that this was in fact quite a political story. The parallels are clever, names and characters are redolent of all that is our history, our present and our possible future. Religion and politics, societal norms and racial prejudices all have a part to play in the thought-provoking storyline. And it is a bleak, unpleasant prospect indeed, if this scenario were to come true.

The story is told by the eponymous Valentina and, considering the traumatic nature of her experience, I found the account unrealistically cold and factual. There seemed to be no depth of emotion and even the more dramatic moments seemed to be told at a remove. Valentina appears to observe events without them affecting her deeply, yet her encounters are life changing. The characters are caricatures, almost archetypal, and each is clearly defined, if somewhat underdeveloped. The story however is satisfying, coming to an enlightening conclusion for Valentina and the reader.

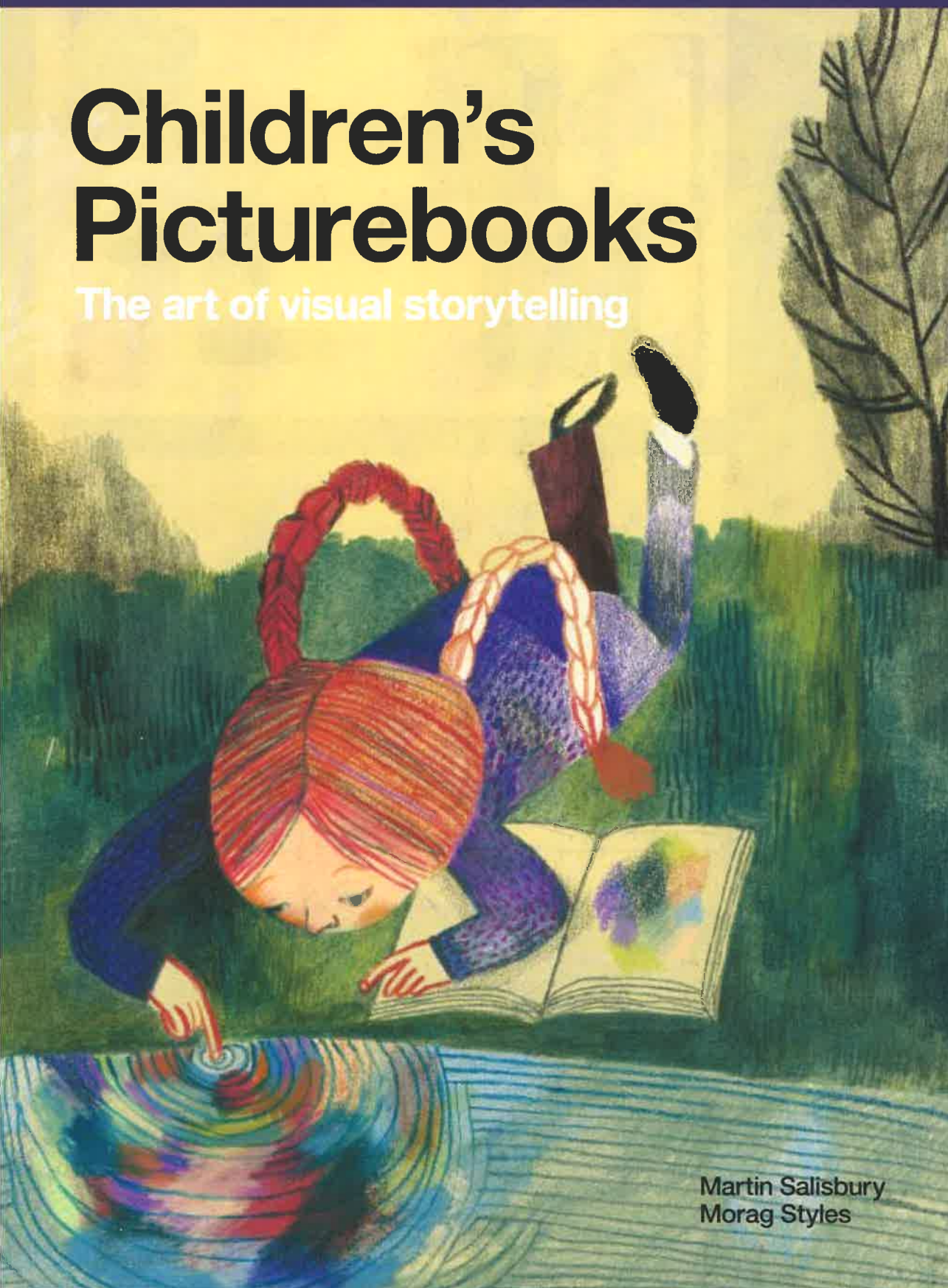
Judy Pomeroy is a primary school teacher in Co Wicklow.

WAYS OF SEEING

Who is the greatest picturebook creator of our times? What, indeed, is a picturebook? Do e-books offer an exciting opportunity to enhance printed picturebooks? Why should we even care about picturebooks? These are some of the questions addressed in the fascinating and dangerous read that is *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling*. I guarantee it will get you looking anew at old favourites from your picturebook shelves, as well as putting your library and bank cards through their paces.

Children's Picturebooks

The art of visual storytelling



Martin Salisbury
Morag Styles

Children's Picturebooks:
The Art of Visual Storytelling
Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles
Laurence King Publishing, 2012
Paperback, 192pp
ISBN 9781656697385

This is not a book that fills just one gap, it fills countless gaps. In fewer than 200 pages, it conveys a wealth of information about more or less all aspects of picturebooks, and while at times one would like more on a specific topic, it does point to lines of further enquiry. Laid out in a seven sections, its organisation is clear and concise. It ranges from a brief history of the picturebook to picturebooks as works of art to picturebooks and children to practical advice about getting a picturebook published, and once published how it is marketed and reviewed – it suggests that many reviewers are unsure and bland when it comes to writing about picturebooks. Too true, unfortunately.

A great strength of this volume is the way in which the techniques of picturebook making are explained and the physicality of how the form (picturebooks are not a genre) operates. How changes in printing techniques have aided the development of picturebook creation are explained clearly, as are the design elements involved in making a good picturebook. For example, the importance of the relationship between the visual shape and layout of the words and the pictures is emphasised.

Examples of the topics discussed are shown and case studies of the work of various picturebook artists consolidate arguments. That the work of many of these artists does not come from the Anglo-American world is refreshing and illustrates the fact that picturebooks published outside English assume a readership that does not consist mainly of beginner readers. For that reason, it is a pity that the title says 'Children's Picturebooks', not just 'Picturebooks'. Many of the books considered are for all ages and some, as the authors point out, are not at all for very young children.

This stylish, savvy and very readable volume shows as well as tells, just as a good picturebook should. It has to be recommended highly for anyone studying picturebooks, whether with a view to making them, publishing them, critically examining them, introducing them to children, or just loving them.

Valerie Coghlan is a librarian at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.



© Laurence King Publishing, 2012

With a focus on picturebooks at the avant-garde end of the market, the authors argue convincingly for picturebooks as theatre, mixing words, visual tableaux and the physical drama that comes from turning the page. Librarians, teachers, reviewers and picturebook creators (published and aspiring) will find inspiration in this engaging book, replete with beautiful reproductions of international picturebook art.

Although a wonderful book, worth seeking out even if you already own other reference books in this field, I would have enjoyed it even more if there had been greater exploration of

books where writer and illustrator are not one and the same person. Given the importance placed on counterpoint, a deeper insight into how this can be successfully achieved when more than one person is involved would have been very interesting.

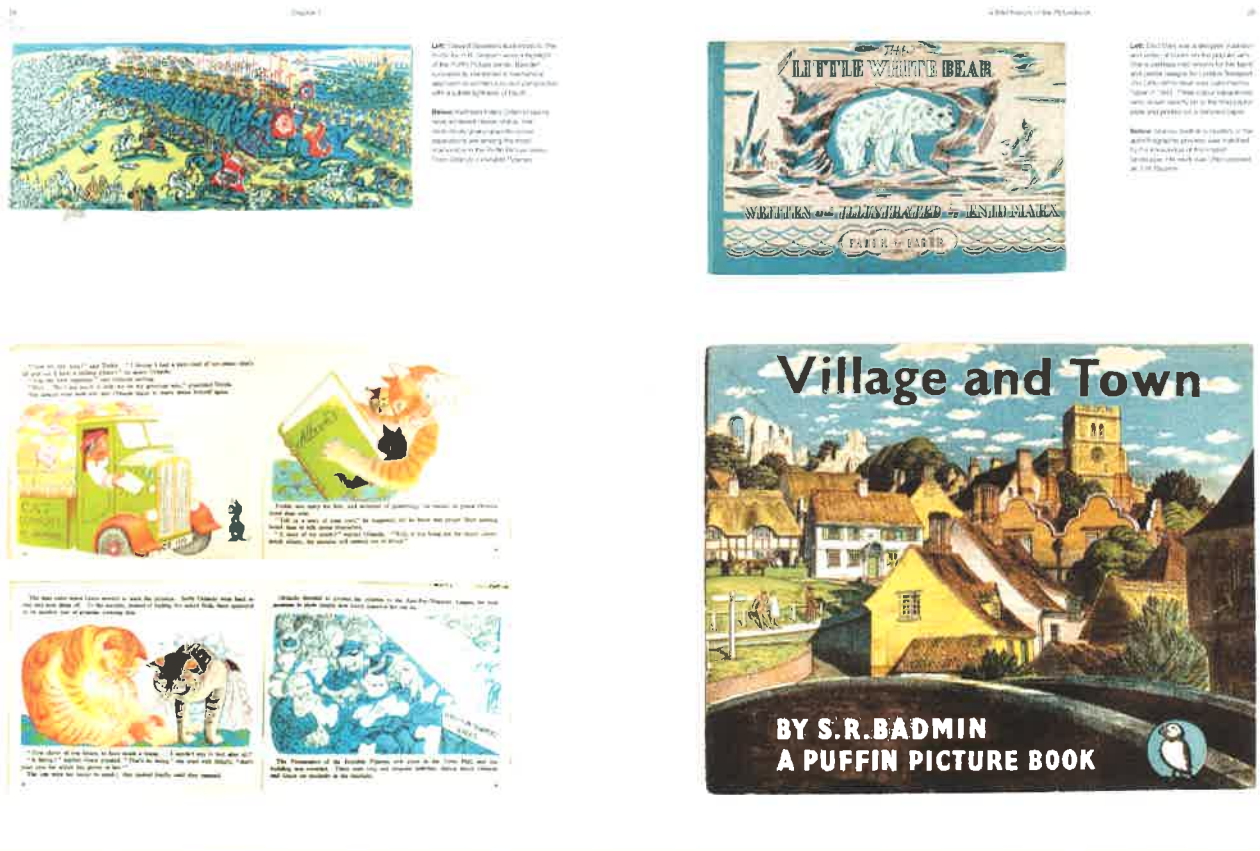
Also, more consideration could have been given to books popular with children, rather than with adults and academics. I am disappointed that barely any illustrators who have won awards voted for by children (e.g. Delphine Durand, Mo Willems, Polly Dunbar) feature in this book. Furthermore, comics and graphic novels (surely

visual storytelling par excellence) could have been given more than a cursory glance. These formats are both important in convincing a wider readership that illustrated books are not just for the 0–7 crowd.

Small gripes aside, if you're passionate about picturebooks, this is essential reading.

Zoe Toft writes at *Playing by the Book*, where she reviews fantastic kids' books and describes the crazy, fun stuff they inspire her family to get up to.





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AMANDA PIESSE

'At university', Salisbury and Styles begin, 'interest in and research around the subject of the picturebook has tended to divide clearly between the practitioners in the art and design sector and the theorists in the education sector ... in this book, we have sought to bring together the practice and theory of children's picturebook.'

This account of what the authors term 'visual literature' moves the study of children's books one giant step further towards a welcome interdisciplinary approach. Produced for academics and practitioners at the same time, it is in itself a picturebook, academic and practical analysis in conversation and sometimes silent contemplation with the rich visual reproductions it addresses.

A chapter on the history of the picturebook sits alongside one on art theory and case studies from established practitioners, recently graduated art students and soon-to-be-published PhDs concerning reading practice and child-centred focus groups. The international range, the identification of printing houses as well as writers, illustrator and publishers and the detailed but accessible accounts of the technicalities behind production all extend the experience and the critical vocabularies of each group. The text is extraordinarily up-to-date in its sources and its approach, offering cutting-edge research into reading practice and production values alongside strong expressions of aesthetics and theory that are often productively in tension with each other.

Salisbury and Styles combine their respective areas of expertise to produce a book that is at once a shrewd evaluation of where the picturebook is at aesthetically and a how-to book on the process of conceiving of, producing and getting a picturebook published. And many of the images, while they are attributed, are left to speak for themselves, texts in languages other than English remaining untranslated. This is a highly intelligent book, an invaluable academic and aesthetic resource.

Amanda Piesse is a fellow, tutor and senior lecturer at Trinity College Dublin.



Inis is the magazine of Children's Books Ireland, the national children's books organisation. Within these pages you will find features and articles on Irish and international children's books as well as in-depth reviews of new titles for children and teenagers. With its independent voice and range of expert contributors, this is a key resource for schools, writers, illustrators, libraries, parents and everyone interested in children's books.

Continue the conversation with us at **www.inismagazine.ie** where you will find more reviews, articles and up-to-the-minute news.