

**Marcus Sedgwick**

**Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2022**

**UK Author Nomination**



## Marcus Sedgwick Biography

“I like challenging myself ....But I also think we underestimate young people and their capacity to take on new ideas”.<sup>1</sup> Marcus Sedgwick has challenged readers from the beginning but he can also have fun.

He was born in 1968 in Kent, England where he grew up. Books have always featured in his life – he has worked both as a bookseller and with a publishing company. Though he has been Author-in-Residence at Bath Spa University and has taught on the Arvon Creative Writing Courses, he himself is self taught “I taught myself to write, by writing four books that remain unpublished. The first was terrible... the fifth book I wrote got published, won an award”.<sup>2</sup> This was *Floodland*, a dystopian novel that won the Branford Boase Award 2001, an annual prize which celebrates the best debut novel published in the UK for children. This was only the beginning and heralded Marcus’ interest in darker themes that will challenge his readers, themes reflected in *My Sword Hand is Singing*. This novel won the Booktrust Teenage Prize in 2007. In 2009 *Revolver* appeared, shortlisted for the Carnegie and cited as a Printz Honor Book when it appeared in the US in 2011. It was an IBBY Honour List book in 2012. In 2014 he was awarded the Printz Award for *Midwinter Blood*, a novel in which the themes are explored through interlocking narratives that cross time. This experimental approach reappears in *The Ghosts of Heaven* – his second Printz Honor (2016) – where Sedgwick’s fascination with mathematics, and in particular the Fibonacci Spiral is embedded in the storytelling.

However, he does not confine his writing to a young adult audience. He has written several series for younger audiences in which humour has a strong place. One series is the Raven Mysteries adventures in which he introduces a wonderfully Gothic family. The third in the series, *Lunatics and Luck*, was shortlisted for the Blue Peter Award in 2011. Marcus’ writing indeed covers the whole spectrum, ranging from the youngest with his Early Readers to adult. He has also written several graphic novels notably *Dark Satanic Mills* and *The Voyages in the Underworld of Orpheus Black* in collaboration with his brother Julian Sedgwick.

Personal experience adds depth to his writing. In *She is Not Invisible* the main character is blind; Marcus records he himself has had sight problems – “Bringing this personal knowledge into the book was an entirely unconscious decision”.<sup>3</sup> Though suffering ME he continues to write, engaging with contemporary issues. *Saint Death*, also shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal, dramatically highlights the situation faced by Mexican and South American families as they seek asylum in the US, while his latest novel, *Snowflake, AZ* takes on climate change and a pandemic.

This is Marcus Sedgwick – illustrator, musician and an author whose imagination ranges from the deep past to a dystopian present and can include an adventure for such an established character as Dr Who – continually looking to challenge both himself and his readers.

<sup>1</sup> Books for Keeps 209: Authorgraph <http://books-forkeeps.co.uk/issue/209/childrens-books/articles/authorgraph/authorgraph-209-marcus-sedgwick>

<sup>2</sup> Undiagnosis :You can’t teach writing so why go on a course <https://marcussedgwick.me/2018/03/16/you-cant-teach-writing-so-why-go-on-a-course>

<sup>3</sup> Books for Keeps 209: Authorgraph <http://books-forkeeps.co.uk/issue/209/childrens-books/articles/authorgraph/authorgraph-209-marcus-sedgwick>  
<https://marcussedgwick.com/>

## Marcus Sedgwick A Critical Statement

“[Marcus] Sedgwick is one of our finest writers, specialising in a kind of dark intensity which, if not always gothic, is usually gothish. Even his humorous writing for younger children is in the Addams Family mould.”<sup>1</sup>

Reviewing *Midwinterblood* (2011), author Anthony McGowan describes the ‘dark intensity’ that anyone reading a book by Marcus Sedgwick is likely to encounter. As he notes, this may come from the gothic landscape portrayed in a novel such as *My Swordhand is Singing* (2006). Equally, it could describe works that evoke disquiet and the sense of impending tragedy, as in *White Crow* (2010), or novels that are what Anthony McGowan describes as ‘gothish’ in their themes of sacrifice, loss, suffering and enduring love, as the stories which make up *Midwinterblood* reveal. Marcus describes himself as a first generation Goth<sup>2</sup> which, in light of the mood in much of his writing is unsurprising, however, his body of work is more than this...

While the focus here is on his writing for a young adult readership, it should be noted that he has developed a diverse body of work, in a writing career spanning more than twenty years. Among his early work were picture books, he has collaborated on graphic novels, and written for adults, as well as academic papers and non-fiction works. There have also been series written for younger readers, which illustrate a humour rarely found in his YA novels, albeit in the ‘Addams Family mould’ that Anthony McGowan recognises. The shift to comedy and lighthearted mayhem demonstrates the versatility of the author and he was recognised by the judging panel when *Lunatics and Luck* (2010), the third book in the Raven Mysteries series (2009–2011), was awarded the Blue Peter Book Award in 2011.

It is, however, the YA novels that represent the majority of Marcus’s work to date and collectively, they are notable not only for the scope of the subjects they address, but also the trust they exhibit in readers to engage with the often challenging and unusual texts, from the taut, atmospheric, frozen landscape brought to life in *Revolver* (2009), to the meta-textual puzzle, pondering on coincidence, that is *She Is Not Invisible* (2013), through the innovative bringing together of the political and social upheaval of the Russian revolution with the little known tale of Arthur Ransome’s time as a spy for the British secret service in *Blood Red Snow White*

(2007). Speaking in an interview with Nicholas Tucker for *Books For Keeps*, Marcus explains his approach. “I can only write what I want to write and in the way that I do. As I like challenging myself when I write it follows that I will probably be challenging young readers too when the book comes out. It may be that I would sell more copies if I sometimes made things easier. But I also think we underestimate young people and their capacity to take on new ideas.”<sup>3</sup> Based on the success of his work, both critically and with readers, I would suggest that his instinct is correct.

Critical acclaim arrived early as Marcus’s first published novel, *Floodland* (2000), received the Branford Boase Award in 2001. Set in a dystopian future, global warming has caused water levels to rise to the point where people are forced to live on ever shrinking pieces of land and society has begun to fragment. The novel is in many respects a classic bildungsroman, a coming of age tale, as the reader travels with the young protagonist, Zoe, who is searching for her family, rowing her way from one broken society to another. Although the novel ends on a positive note in that Zoe is reunited with her parents, there is no resolution to the ongoing environmental emergency, and unfortunately, the novel has only become more relevant with the passing of time and consequently, continues to be read widely in schools. What some critics have described as the somewhat implausible happy ending<sup>4</sup>, perhaps signals the younger readership the novel addresses, but also suggests an author getting into their stride, which was certainly true, as the novels which followed testify. They include *The Dark Horse* (2001), the tale of a girl known as Mouse, set in the frozen wastes of the far North in ancient times, which was followed by *The Book of Dead Days* (2003) and its conclusion, *The Dark Flight Down* (2004), taking place in a distant time that never existed. Truly Gothic in tone, they recount the tale of Boy and Willow overcoming life in the dark, sinister back streets of the city, partly living underground, and subsequently spending time in the splendid but corrupt court of Emperor Frederick. It is in these early novels that Marcus developed the hauntingly atmospheric landscapes that have become a distinct feature in much of his later writing.

Published in 2006, *My Swordhand is Singing* went on to win the 2007 Booktrust Teenage Prize and has

subsequently been translated into over thirty languages, becoming one of Marcus's most successful novels. In describing the foundations for his 'vampire' novel, Marcus explained that he made the decision to focus on old, Eastern European folktales and their portrayals of the vampire, but in doing so found his earlier assumptions, based on the films and novels he had come across in popular culture, were challenged. In *My Swordhand is Singing*, there is no mention of vampires within the text, making the creeping sense of dread more effective.<sup>5</sup> The novel is set in a harsh, bleak landscape in a small village in Eastern Europe in the early 17th century, and at its centre is the relationship between the young protagonist Peter, and his taciturn, irascible, drunken father, Tomas, a woodcutter with a secret past. The revelation that the Shadow Queen, believed to belong only to folklore, has brought 'hostages' back to life in a vampiric state leads to the climax of the novel when Tomas, a former vampire slayer, takes on the undead villagers. After he is mortally wounded, Peter takes up the sword from his father: 'That's it,' he whispered. 'That's it. Feel it.' In his heart, he heard Peter's reply. 'Yes, Father. My swordhand is singing.'<sup>6</sup> The weaving together of elements of the folktale in the austere, ominous landscape of the novel and the depiction of Peter and Tomas' hostile relationship that is filled with love and commitment, demonstrates a writer whose craft has developed eloquently.

Moving forward in time to 1910 and a cabin one hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle, 2009's *Revolver* brings to life a moral dilemma for Sig Andersson, whose father, Einar, has been found frozen to death out on the lake. Alone in the cabin Sig has to face Einar's blackmailer, Gunther Wolff. The narrative switches between the present, in the cramped, claustrophobic atmosphere of the cabin, and the backstory of Einar's embezzlement of gold. Sig begins to piece this together as Wolff's menace and potential for violence become more acute. The novel is at once a taut, intense tale and a contemplation on the purpose of a gun; something that maintains order or opens up the potential for violence, a question that remains relevant and causes division and disquiet. However, the narrative is never subsumed by the questions that arise from it, and illustrates a skilled storyteller who is able to maintain suspense while raising pertinent questions, recognised in *Revolver* being made a Printz Honor book in 2011.

The more recent *Saint Death* (2016) also poses a massive dilemma for its protagonist, Arturo, enduring the stifling heat of Juarez, on the Mexican-US border, where violence and menace are a daily realities, and death is never far away, be it through the gangs, cartels or grinding

poverty. Events set in motion by Arturo's former friend Faustino, now a gang member, end with Arturo having to make a choice about life or death. With allusions to Dr Faustus, Faustino has sold his soul to Santa Muerte – Saint Death, the novel begins and ends with violent death. Does Arturo's decision to choose death over becoming what he despises make his an honourable death, or is he just another casualty of seemingly never ending, pointless violence, a victim of the circle of death. Inserting political talking points, social media posts and prayers, position Arturo's story within the bigger context, but it is ultimately the author's ability to craft a powerful sense of place, claustrophobic and menacing, and the character of Arturo, fearful and brave, that gives the novel its power.

The sense of living on the edges of civilisation where the impact of the environment is more immediate and visceral, is evident in the novels discussed above, and likely relates to Marcus's own attraction to these spaces, living in the Haute-Savoie, a remote valley in the French Alps which he acknowledges makes him acutely aware of the power of nature.<sup>7</sup> Being on the edge of a society, in a new or strange landscape or alienated, can be encapsulated in different ways, as the novels *Blood Red*, *Snow White* (2007) and *White Crow* (2010) portray. Interweaving stories across time, *White Crow* is a disquieting, gothic thriller which describes an intense and increasingly dangerous friendship in the present, and a bloody, uncanny interest in the afterlife in the seventeenth century, ending in tragedy as the two stories collide dramatically. The narrative again, gives the reader much to contemplate beyond the story, and the gothic nature of the tale resonates with the atmosphere of *My Swordhand is Singing*, although *White Crow* is a more disturbing tale, without the resolution afforded by the former. However, the confidence and surety of the storytelling makes this a powerful, addictive tale, recognised by the judging panel of the Carnegie Medal when it was shortlisted in 2011.

Much debate has surrounded the concept of children's literature and the issue of what is suitable and who decides. Although young adult fiction has also been ensnared by these arguments, ultimately, the success of YA novels seems to rest more squarely with the audience as books are more likely to be bought by young adults than for them. This opens up the more interesting question of what they choose to read and why. Certainly, 2007's *Blood Red*, *Snow White* is an example of a novel which has none of the obvious elements of what is traditionally understood to be a YA novel, and yet it tells a story that is both unique and universal. It fuses fairy tale, spy

story, pivotal moments from Russian history fictionalised, and a love story, linked through the unlikely history of Arthur Ransome's time in revolutionary Russia. The novel captures both the sense of history in the making and the tensions and simmering violence of social unrest on a grand scale. Certainly, it illustrates Marcus Sedgwick as an author who writes about what interests him and makes YA literature more expansive and remarkable as a result.

In 2014, Marcus was awarded the Michael L. Printz Award for *Midwinterblood* (2011), a novel that is structurally complex, weaving together stories that travel across the centuries from the future in 2073, back to 'time unknown', connected by the remote island of Blessed. The individual stories move through the seasons, each referenced by the name of a full moon. Each of the stories include different incarnations of Eric, Merle, and the priest figure who are introduced in the first segment, and unite the individual stories, raising questions about sacrifice and eternal love. Interviewed about the novel after winning the Michael L. Printz Award, Marcus considered his interest in reincarnation, positing it from the perspective of why he created seven stories: "Have you ever asked yourself why you were given the life you were given? Why you were born who you are, and not someone else, in a different place, or time, or body?"<sup>8</sup> He goes on to explain that doing this through the theme of eternal love made it more fun, but this existential questioning is something that has become a staple in his writing, making it richer and more eloquent as a result.

Marcus used a somewhat similar approach in the outstanding *The Ghosts of Heaven* (2015). A quartet of stories from different points in time, and connected through the symbol of a spiral, the stories can be read in any order, which is especially significant because although very different in form, they each shine a light on 'human nature' that is shared – the need to explore, to find answers, to understand. While the order in which the stories are read may change the perception as a whole, the spiral is a continuum and the stories go on. Shortlisted for the Costa Children's Book Award in 2014 and a Printz Honor book in 2016, *The Ghosts of Heaven* highlights an author who is confident in his craft and prepared to challenge both himself and his readership.

2013's *She is Not Invisible* initially appears to be a more straightforward story, a girl and her brother searching for their missing father in a contemporary New York. Laureth needs Benjamin, only seven, to guide her around New York because she is blind. The first person narrative of Laureth immerses the reader in her world which is described through sound, smell, and action. A series of

coincidences befall Laureth and Benjamin which in less skilful hands, would descend into contrivance to forward the plot, but here they are used to good effect and leave a sense of unease about the extent to which coincidence exists, for both Laureth and the reader. The number 354 is embedded throughout the text in different ways, a meta-textual device that is present in several of the novels. From the referencing of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in *The Ghosts of Heaven*, to the use of song titles as chapter headings in *White Crow*, and the inclusion of song lyrics from Nick Drake and Led Zepplin in the text of *Midwinterblood*, these novels offer readers layers of discovery and ideas to ponder.

In the interview in which Marcus discusses his Michael L. Printz Award, he suggests that "[...] stories are places for our desires and imaginations to explore the world more freely than they perhaps do in real life."<sup>9</sup> Certainly, the compelling, complex tales that Marcus has contributed to YA fiction offer the reader the opportunity to contemplate life in its many iterations, and in doing so, expand the possibilities of the genre. The hope is that he will continue to evolve his writing, offering singular, powerful texts that reflect his diverse interests and meticulous research.

### Michele Gill

<sup>1</sup> "Review: CHILDREN'S FICTION: Anthony McGowan shivers through dark tales of the past: *Midwinterblood* by Marcus Sedgwick 224pp, Indigo, pounds 9.99." Guardian [London / England], 8 Oct. 2011, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> [www.marcussedgwick.com/biography](http://www.marcussedgwick.com/biography)

<sup>3</sup> [booksforkeeps.co.uk/print/issue/209/childrens-books/articles/authorgraph/authorgraph-209-marcus-sedgwick](http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/print/issue/209/childrens-books/articles/authorgraph/authorgraph-209-marcus-sedgwick)

<sup>4</sup> Hammer, Y. 'Confronting ecological futures: global environmental crises in contemporary survival quests for young adults', *Barnboken*, 2010, vol. 33(2), pp. 34-50.

<sup>5</sup> Sedgwick, M. 'The elusive vampire: folklore and fiction – writing *My Swordhand is Singing*' in, George, S., and Hughes, W. (eds.) *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013, pp. 264-275.

<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick, M. *My Swordhand is Singing*. London, Orion Children's Books, 2010 [2006], p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Sedgwick, M. 'Cold comfort', *Sunday Times*, 13 November 2016, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ilene Cooper. 'The Booklist Printz Interview: Marcus Sedgwick', *Booklist*, March 15, 2014, p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> Ilene Cooper. 'The Booklist Printz Interview: Marcus Sedgwick', *Booklist*, March 15, 2014, p. 76.

## Marcus Sedgwick Interviews

### Nicholas Tucker talks to Marcus Sedgwick for Books for Keeps

Any book by Marcus Sedgwick holds out rich promise. His light-hearted stories for younger children are always funny. His novels for older readers increasingly mix suspense and a high sense of atmosphere with explorations into whatever intellectual conundrum is most occupying him at the moment. He suffered from M.E. for some time, but has now recovered sufficiently well to write two truly ground-breaking works, *She Is Not Invisible*, published last year and *The Ghosts of Heaven*, just out now. There is also a new dark thriller for adults, *A Love Like Blood*, published in spring this year.

**We are meeting, suitably enough for a writer attracted to all things Gothic, in the cavernous and dimly lit cellar of Cambridge's Hotel du Vin, near enough to the small village where Marcus lives. Slim, quietly spoken, consistently thoughtful but with an engaging sense of humour, he makes an ideal subject for any interviewer. So what comes first when he is planning a novel for young adults, the story or the philosophical speculation that so often accompanies it?**

'Whatever is particularly interesting me at the time comes first. In the case of *She is Not Invisible*, my fascination with the whole subject of coincidences which underlies the main plot had been knocking around in my notebooks for at least ten years. When I finally decided that this would be an interesting topic to write about I then had to find a story which will allow me to discuss what I wanted to discuss. In the case of coincidences, bad writers have used them so often that no-one ends taking them seriously. But no authors have ever tried writing about them as a main topic, which is what I have tried to do.'

**This novel also has some discussion of Jung's theory of synchronicity. Do the sort of coincidences he discusses mean much to you?**

'I certainly have had experience of them myself which started me thinking. The number 354, which crops up a lot in the story, has always had a particular fascination for me. Long after this interest materialised I travelled to New York. The taxi that met me was number 354 and so was the hotel room reserved for me!'

Marcus continues to feature this particular number in his fiction. The 354th word in *She is Not Invisible* is 'coincidence' and the book finishes, as you may already have guessed, on page 354. There are other connections too for eagle-eyed readers to work out for themselves.

**The *Ghosts of Heaven* focuses instead on the significance of the Fibonacci Spiral and the way it is repeatedly found in nature. It also crops up in the book's four interlinked stories, stretching from the Stone Age to life in a sinister American Lunatic Asylum, as they were then called, during the 1920s. There is also mention of the possible significance of other mathematical formulae. Where does this particular interest come from?**

I have always liked numbers and read maths at university, though only for the first year. But I have retained a lingering interest in it ever since. Although maths can be quite good at supplying definitive answers, I prefer to let readers come up with their own take on what I am writing. *The Ghosts of Heaven*, for example, is made up of four separate parts set in a different time and in a different place. These can be read in any order. I know which order makes most sense to me but I haven't told my readers about that. They must find their own way themselves.'

**You also write about witch trials in your latest novel and have visited that topic before in your story *Witch Hill*. Is this another special area for you?**

'Well, it's such a fascinating topic. I always do lots of research before I write, until I get to the point when the story I want to tell is almost bursting out. For the purposes of my last novel I read a great deal about the Salem Witch Trials which are quite fascinating in their combination of hostility and claustrophobia.'

**You seem happy at times to push your readers quite a bit in your fiction. Is this deliberate?**

'I can only write what I want to write and in the way that I do. As I like challenging myself when I write it follows that I will probably be challenging young readers too when the book comes out. It may be that I would sell more copies if I sometimes made things easier. But I also think we underestimate young people and their capacity to take on new ideas.'

**But what about your comic adventure stories for young readers? They're great fun but they're not exactly challenging.**

'They are more like saying to a small child, 'Come and sit next to me and I will tell you a story and we will have lots of laughs along the way.' The actual writing involved may not be as fulfilling but it's a lot more enjoyable to do. But I've stopped at least for a bit with younger stuff. There's one more coming out next January. Otherwise I am going more in the direction of somewhere between young adult and adult fiction, alternating between the two with each book.'

**You have sometimes illustrated your books with your own woodcuts or stone carvings. Is that something you are going to continue?**

'I don't think so. I never have enough time. I have been doing quite a lot of school visits over the last three years as well as writing full-time but I have reined back on these too now. Last week I addressed about 350 Year 9 pupils and what with still recovering from M.E. felt totally wiped out afterwards.'

**That sounds tiring enough even without M.E. Do you think you will ever write about your own encounter with this still-mysterious illness?**

'Possibly. But if I do it will be an unconscious process coming out in its own time. The main character in *She is Not Invisible* is blind. But it only struck me the other day that all the time I was describing her I was also drawing on my own experience when I had sight problems some years back, thankfully all cured now. Bringing this personal knowledge into the book was an entirely unconscious decision.'

Marcus is now aged 46 with a substantial body of work already behind him. It will be fascinating to see where he will go next. One thing is certain: whatever he does it will be different from the bulk of whatever else is going on in British children's publishing today, and many would say all the better for that.

**Authorgraph Book for Keeps 209 November 2014**

<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/209/childrens-books/articles/authorgraph/authorgraph-209-marcus-sedgwick>

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# One Thing Leads to Another: An Interview with Marcus Sedgwick for YALSA

## **Please describe your teenage self.**

Oh God, do I have to? Shy, quiet, introspective, shy, gawky, spotty, shy, timid, scared, shy, nervous and did I mention that I was shy..?

## **What did you want to be when you grew up? Why?**

I had no idea what I wanted to be when I was a teenager. That worried me I think — I had no idea what life was about, what it could be about, what I wanted, what there even was to think about doing. I found the thought of the adult world very frightening, and still do, in many ways. I had no idea about how things work; things like jobs, money, insurance, mortgages, etc. etc. The adult world seemed so complicated but to be honest, I was just struggling with being a teenager to worry too much about the years to come.

## **What were your high school years like?**

High school was pretty traumatic. I went to a type of English school called a Grammar School. These are typically old establishments — mine was founded in 1563 (and that's by no means the oldest), and very often in the '80s, when I was there, they were still stuck in the past. Violence came from not just the other boys (it was a single sex school) but from the masters too. And though being beaten up or hit with a hockey stick was bad, it was the psychological torture that was worse. The school seemed to almost condone such matters. We were told it was "character building," but it certainly didn't work for a timid, shy (did I mention that already?), weak young boy. Sorry, this is turning into a therapy session! The whole thing was pretty rough with the exception of two teachers who made life tolerable, so my mental energies were pointed in the direction of home, where I was much, much happier. I am lucky to have come from a truly loving family.

## **What were some of your passions during that time?**

As an older teenager, music began to be really important to me. I was a first generation Goth — I think because it felt more real to me than the commercial pap of the mainstream. Plus the music was great. And the look. My first ever gig wasn't goth though, but The Smiths, and that probably was a major boost to me — it set me on a course of going to loads of concerts. I was also, and still am, very much into classical music — it was Mozart and Wagner back then. Wagner became Mahler as I grew

older, and nowadays, it's Richard Strauss, who I believe has composed the most sublime music of all time, with the possible exception of Chopin. I did little sport as a teenager, but I read a lot. I was one of those teens who didn't cause their parents any problems — I sat in my room, listening to music and reading — the most important book of my life then was the Gormenghast trilogy by Mervyn Peake. That certainly changed my life, and I have my Dad to thank for introducing them to me.

## **Would you be willing to share a difficult teen experience or challenge that you feel shaped the adult you became?**

Oh, whoops, it looks like I did that already! See above... Which is not one specific incident, but rather the accumulated painful experiences of High School. It left me as a very worried individual, but there was the seed of something positive about me, and that thing was...

## **What about a positive experience or accomplishment that had an impact on your adult self?**

...determination. It's almost the only quality of myself that I am proud of. I am very determined, so on the very day that I arrived at University, I decided that I couldn't go on being so shy (did I talk about that? Maybe I haven't spelled out exactly how painful, how disabling, my shyness was — it stopped me from doing almost anything, from answering the phone to making friends to speaking to girls etc. etc.). On that day, as I arrived at University, I decided that I would pretend I wasn't shy. No one knew me. I could reinvent myself. So I did. And after about three months went by, I realized I was no longer shy. I was normal — which is to say, shy sometimes, confident others, sad then happy then calm then excited. But no longer was I permanently disabled by shyness.

## **What advice, if any, would you give your teen self? Would your teen self have listened?**

I would like to be able to give myself lots of advice. Like: stop worrying so much; it will be okay. You won't be spotty forever. You're not as ugly as you think you are. You will one day not only be able to talk to girls but will actually go out with them too. I would have listened, but I'm not sure I would have believed any of it. And if I had told myself that one day I would be able to give a presentation to several hundred people for an hour or so without feeling nervous, I would have been sure I was lying.



**Do you have any regrets about your teen years? Anything left undone or anything that might have been better left undone?**

It's a shame that I was so timid. But it was me, and it was the way things were. I could have had more fun perhaps, but I think it does mean I won't ever become too arrogant towards other people, because I know what it is to feel scared.

**What, if anything, do you miss most about that time?**

My Dad. He died when I was just 20, and apart from him, you can keep my teenage years. But I do miss not having to worry about money/jobs/cars/houses/insurance/mortgages, and all that other deeply dull stuff that adults have invented for themselves.

**Your new book, *She Is Not Invisible*, is about coincidences and you've noted<sup>1</sup> that you've had some "pretty weird ones happen" to you over the years. Would you be willing to share some of the weird ones? How did the idea of "coincidence" – rather than any particular coincidence in itself – come to fascinate you and what drew you to the idea of writing a whole book about it?**

The weirdest thing that ever happened to me, by far, is the coincidence that happens to the writer, Jack Peak, in the book. The thing with the book on the train, the German lady etc. etc. This coincidence is so weird that most people don't believe me when I tell them, and I have told very few people as a result. So I stopped telling people and decided to put it in the book instead, but actually my interest in coincidences goes back years before that – I didn't want to write about one single coincidence because, for various reasons, coincidences are very hard to write about. On the one hand, they are what bad writers use to make their plots work. On the other, people aren't interested in minor coincidences, and, as I found, they don't believe the major ones. So I thought it would be better to tackle the subject sideways, through the eyes of a writer who is himself obsessed by the subject.

**Critics have highlighted various themes in your work – love, loss, and sacrifice, among them – but I'm particularly interested in the things you yourself have to say about the power of "belief." You've written that *Dark Satanic Mills*, the graphic novel you wrote with your brother, was heavily influenced by William Blake and that "our message, if we have one, is Blake's: create your own system of belief, or be enslaved by another man's." <sup>2</sup> In other words, "believe what you want to believe, not what you are told to believe." Your YA novel *White Crow* also deals explicitly with the ideas of belief and conscience, especially the consequences of**

**questioning beliefs. Could you talk about the power and consequences of belief and how you explore those ideas in your work and in your interaction with readers? <sup>3</sup>**

We live in interesting times, and they are times of change in terms of what belief means. The impression I get of the UK and the US is that to a greater or lesser extent, much of the nation is becoming less "religious", while certain sections of it are finding more extreme versions of religion to believe in. The US may well be a little different from the UK, so I shouldn't speak about what I don't know about, but in the UK although we are still a nominally Christian country, report after report shows that most people are at most agnostic now, and go to church once a year for Christmas, out of habit, if at all.

But this does not mean that people have stopped needing to believe in things, and so I see many people turning to alternative forms of belief and worship. And all of those are fine by me as long as no one tries to force their beliefs on anyone else. That's when the problems start. If you take a look at a book like *White Crow*, its antihero, Ferelith, is obsessed with the matter of life after death, and yet she herself is not religious per se. I wanted to portray a young adult, who I see very often; someone who wants to believe in something, and yet is being offered nothing by the modern pop culture around them. We worship celebrities now, sports stars and film stars, and people with no talent but for making people gossip about them. I think there are lots of people, and among them many teenagers, who feel shortchanged by the vapidness of all of that, and would like something that speaks to them. That was what was at the heart of *White Crow*.

**In a recent interview<sup>4</sup> you explained that folk and fairy tales "are almost my favourite kind of story, and so, ever since I became a writer, I have always tried to find ways of working elements of folklore into my books. How? By using iconic images, words with deep resonance, patterns of storytelling and certain motifs which remind us, subconsciously at least, of those dark stories we all heard at a tender age." Could you talk a bit more about this? What tales were you drawn to growing up and have they changed over the years? Do you have any favorites? Do you consciously look for ways to work elements into your stories or is it a more subtle process? And finally, in the same interview you say, "if I can't get away with writing new fairy tales, at least I can enjoy plundering our literary heritage to populate my books," which leaves me wondering why you don't think you can get away with writing a new fairy tale, and whether you might change your mind someday?**

Yes, I love fairy tales, and folk tales of all kinds, from all cultures and all times. I think they have deep resonance for us, and I have always worked, both explicitly and more subconsciously, to incorporate their rhythms and tropes into my work. There are rich veins of story to be mined, and adapted and plundered! I loved Russian fairy tales as a kid, and Greek and Norse myth. I have read many more varieties of story now, from Sweden to England to North America, and they all have their own special quality and power.

The only reason I said I can't get away with writing new ones is because I wouldn't be able to find a publisher for them — publishers will tell you such things don't sell, and they may be right, but I'd love to find out some time. The closest some people have come is to adapt old stories and recast them in modern clothes, as I did with Cassandra in *The Foreshadowing* in fact. And yet, in certain countries, eg Slovenia where I was recently, their most famous modern author wrote dozens of new fairy tales that are loved and revered.

**Not only do you write and draw, you also play the drums and are clearly an avid music lover. You've said <sup>5</sup> that music has inspired many parts of your books, including the chapter titles in *White Crow*, and "much of the *Book of Dead Days* [which] was inspired by Schubert's epic song cycle, *Winterreise*." The 2014 Printz Award-winning *Midwinterblood* includes "lines by Nick Drake and Led Zeppelin...tucked away in the text, but the most significant source for the book is Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, which is probably the piece that made me fall in love with classical music, as well as modern music. I first heard it at the age of around 14 and as the saying goes, it blew my tiny mind. More energy than the Sex Pistols, freakier than Hendrix." Could you describe your relationship with music over the years and how it colors or inspires your writing? Do you have a sense of why particular songs or bands or musicians or composers <sup>6</sup> resonate for you? And since it sounds like our late teen musical tastes overlap, I have to ask you about your goth days and those early concerts — any memorable moments you'd be willing to share?**

Music is something I love almost more than I love words. It's a close fight between the two. But rather than let it be a fight, I have tried to let music into my head to colour my imagination and to stir my thoughts. I love (almost) all forms of music. It is my belief that the very best of any genre is worth listening to, and as to what it is that resonates for me — it has to be something that is authentic. So I can't listen to mass-produced chart pap, although

I can listen very happily to great pop music if it has something in its heart that is true. I tend to like slightly more obscure pieces of music than the mainstream as a result, but that's not deliberate — as I say, if a piece of pop music is great, I will happily listen to it as well as the weirdest thing on my iPhone.

I don't understand why people delineate between the genres they listen to and the ones they don't. Maybe it's fear or ignorance that does that, but actually I think we live in much more enlightened and all-embracing times than when I was young. Because what makes two pieces of music similar is not if they are from the same country or genre or year and so on. It's not even so much about the key signature or the notes or the melody. It's about emotion, and feeling. So this is how a piece of music like *Winterreise* by Schubert (some of the bleakest and most beautiful music ever written) can share something of the feel of a mournful ballad by Nick Cave. And it's those emotions that music creates that are what we listen to it for, and that's why it has a direct correlation to writing — we read to experience emotion too. So when I'm writing, I play the music that feels like what I am trying to put down on paper, whether that's happiness or melancholy.

Yes, I was a first generation Goth, and I loved it — the music was intense and the lyrics were dark, and it actually (for all its pretentiousness ) meant something. I have great memories of gigs by Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Sisters of Mercy and so on. The first band I ever saw however, and still one of the best gigs of all time for me, was The Smiths, in their first year of success. It was a mind-changing evening.

**This question comes from Laini Taylor <sup>7</sup>: "Hi Marcus! Reading about your process, I was struck by two things in particular: your notebooks and your maps. I keep notebooks too, and refer to them often for the same reason you do. I like the way you put it, about making connections between things lurking in your unconscious. That's it exactly! Are your notebooks a catch-all for stray thoughts, or organized by project? Is there a method to it? And can you explain your maps, and at what point in the writing process you make them, and how you use them? This is fascinating to me, since I feel the need to visualize my structure, but have never tried anything like this. Thank you Marcus, and belated congratulations on the Printz Medal!**

Thanks Laini, lovely question. (And thanks for the congratulations — very kind of you!)

Yes, I have some method to the madness in my notebooks, and that is this: I work in them from the front

and the back simultaneously — in the front I put ideas/ thoughts/notes for the book or project that I am currently working on, and in the back I put ideas for future books. However, these two things are sometimes not clear, and therefore page by page there may be an utter mess of what idea belongs to what project. This is deliberate, however, because I like my ideas to cross pollinate in the notebooks, because sometimes when they do, you come up with things you'd never ever thought of. So the notebook fills up as I do my research.

I agree with you entirely that a book has a shape! I love that idea and sometimes it's not even something you can put into words but it does seem to help make the whole business of writing a book a little bit easier. The maps may have started as small doodles in the notebook, but at some point towards the end of the thinking/research stage, I will start to experiment on large sheets of paper with a map for the book itself. They are in pencil. They change. I may reject two or three until I find the right form. Some are almost purely geographical maps, some are more esoteric. (I blogged about the maps here <sup>8</sup>) I have to find the right structure for each book, so each map is different, but when I have (most) of it as I want it, I will finally sit down, chapter one, line one, and begin to write...

### **Julie Bartel**

<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/>

<sup>1</sup> <https://marcussedgwick.me/2013/10/02/co-inky-dinks/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://marcussedgwick.me/2013/11/10/william-blake-the-first-graphic-novelist/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/16/marcus-sedgwick-teenage-novel>

<sup>4</sup> <https://marcussedgwick.me/2011/10/11/symbols-and-folklore/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://marcussedgwick.me/2011/10/06/the-rite-of-winter/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://marcussedgwick.com/faqs/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.lainitaylor.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://marcussedgwick.me/2013/04/16/maps/>

<https://marcussedgwick.com/>

## Marcus Sedgwick Awards

### Awards

2001	<i>Floodland</i>	Branford Boase Award
2006	<i>The Foreshadowing</i>	North East Teenage Book Award
2007	<i>The Foreshadowing</i>	ALA Best Book for Young Adults Portsmouth Book Award
2007	<i>My Swordhand is Singing</i>	Book Trust Teenage Prize Renfrewshire Book Award
2011	<i>Lunatics and Luck</i>	Blue Peter Award (Best Book with Pictures)
2013	<i>Fright Forest</i>	Rotherham Book Awards (Lower Age Category)
2014	<i>Midwinterblood</i>	Michael J Printz Award
2015	<i>She Is Not Invisible</i>	Essex Book Award Oxfordshire Book Award Rib Valley Book Award Spellbinding Book Award

### Nominations

<i>Snowflake AZ</i>	Nominated for the CILIP Carnegie Medal
<i>Voyages in the Underworld of Orpheus Black (with Julian Sedgwick)</i>	Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal
<i>Saint Death</i>	Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal
<i>The Ghosts of Heaven</i>	A Printz Honor Book Shortlisted for the Bookseller YA Fiction Prize Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal Shortlisted for the Costa Book Awards Shortlisted for the UKLA Book Awards YALSA Teens' Top Ten List
<i>She Is Not Invisible</i>	Shortlisted for The Guardian Children's Book Prize Shortlisted for Les 24 Heures du Livre, Le Mans
<i>Midwinterblood</i>	Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal
<i>White Crow</i>	Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal
<i>Revolver</i>	A Printz Honor Book Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal Shortlisted for The Guardian Children's Book Prize Shortlisted for Le Prix Farniente, Belgium IBBY UK Honour Book
<i>Flood and Fang</i>	Shortlisted for Lancashire Fantastic Book Awards Selected for Scholastic Best Books

***The Kiss of Death***

Shortlisted for The Leeds Book Award  
Longlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal

***Blood Red, Snow White***

Shortlisted for the Costa Children's Book Award  
Nominated for the CILIP Carnegie Medal

***My Swordhand is Singing***

Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal  
Shortlisted for The Brilliant Book Award, Nottingham  
Shortlisted for the Southern School's Book Award  
Shortlisted for the Manchester Book Award  
Shortlisted for the South Lanarkshire Book Award  
Shortlisted for the Calderdale Book of the Year Award  
Shortlisted for the Salford Children's Book Award  
Shortlisted for the Surrey Book Award

***The Foreshadowing***

Shortlisted for the Stockport School Book Award  
Shortlisted for the Salford Children's Book Award  
Shortlisted for the Booktrust Teenage Book Prize  
Shortlisted for the Angus Book Award  
Shortlisted for the American Library Association 'Best Books for Young Adults'  
Longlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal  
Longlisted for the Manchester Book Award

***The Book of Dead Days***

Shortlisted for the Sheffield Children's Book of the Year  
Shortlisted for the South Lanarkshire Book Award  
Shortlisted for the Edgar Allan Poe Award  
Longlisted for The Guardian Children's Fiction Award

***The Dark Horse***

Shortlisted for the Blue Peter Book Award  
Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal  
Shortlisted for The Guardian Children's Fiction Award

***Witch Hill***

Shortlisted for the ALA/IRA award  
Shortlisted for the Edgar Allan Poe Award  
Shortlisted for the Portsmouth Book Award

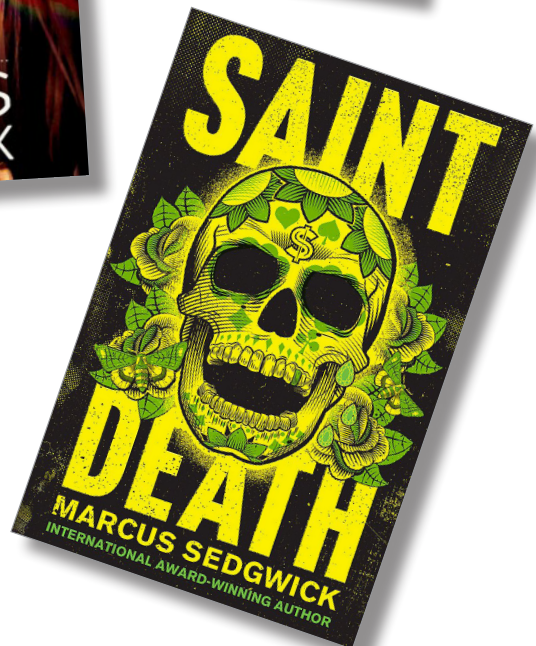
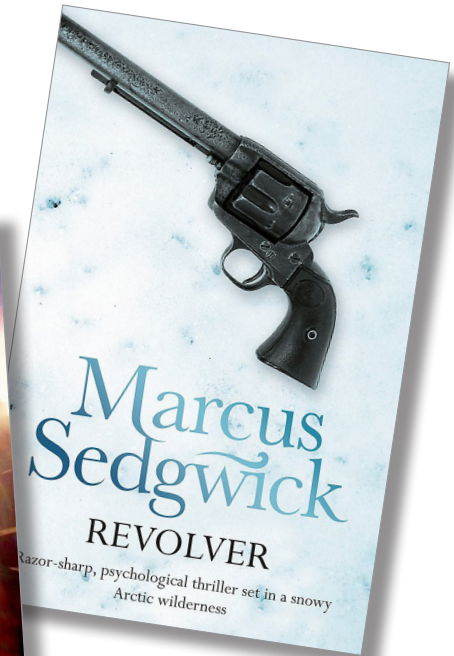
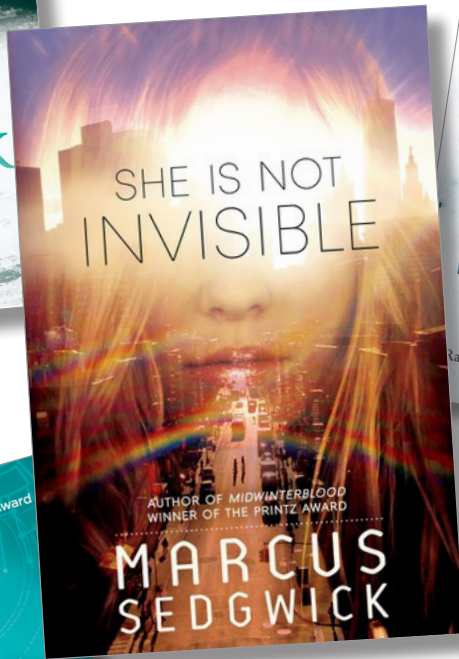
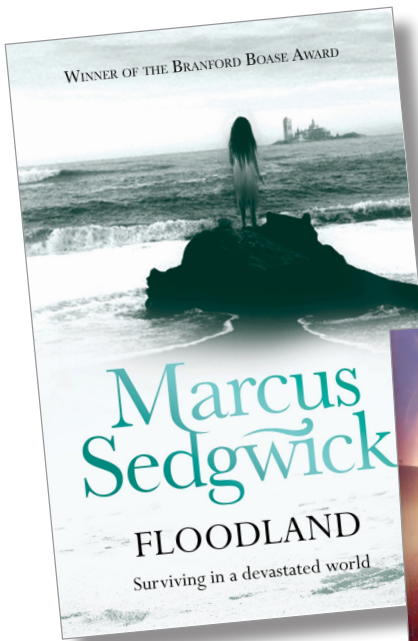
**Honours**

Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

Nominated in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020

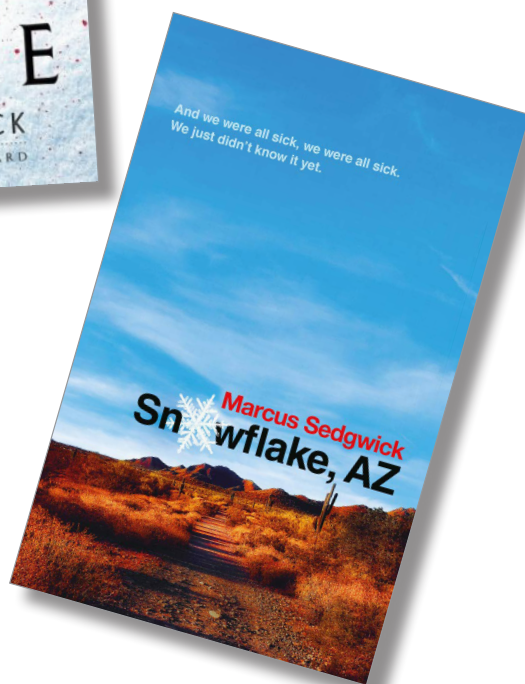
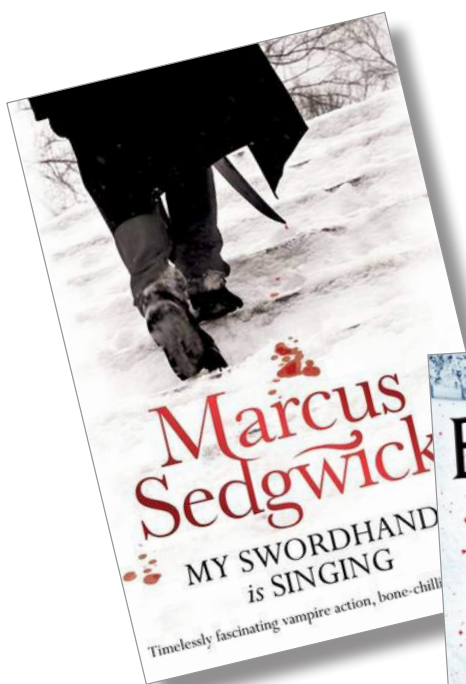
## Five titles for the consideration of the Jury

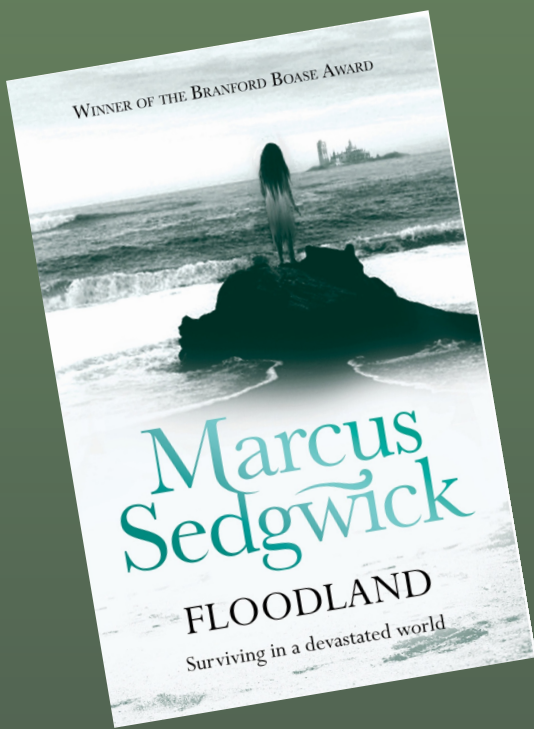
<i>Floodland</i>	Hachette Children's Group
<i>Revolver</i>	Hachette Children's Group
<i>She is not invisible</i>	Hachette Children's Group
<i>The Ghosts of Heaven</i>	Hachette Children's Group
<i>Saint Death</i>	Hachette Children's Group



## Five more titles reflecting Marcus's work

<i>My Swordhand is singing</i>	Hachette Children's Group
<i>Flood and Fang</i>	Hachette Children's Group
<i>Blood Red Snow White</i>	Hachette Children's Group
<i>Midwinter Blood</i>	Hachette Children's Group
<i>Snowflake AZ</i>	Zephyr (Head of Zeus)





## Floodland

*Floodland* is a children's fantasy novel published by Orion Children's Books in 2000. The debut novel of Marcus Sedgwick, it won the Branford Boase Award in 2001 for being an outstanding first published novel. Having recently reviewed Sedgwick's latest book *White Crow*, I decided it would be interesting to start at the beginning and see how *Floodland* holds up ten years later.

*Zoe could see their eyes, clearly. She saw fear. But she couldn't trust them. Since she'd lost her parents, she'd made it a rule not to trust anyone. Zoe had heard people say they'd lost someone, which really meant they had died. In Zoe's case, 'lost' meant exactly that. It was still unbelievable, and so stupid.*

*Floodland* takes place in the near future, where most of the United Kingdom is submerged underwater. Norwich has become an island, with food and water increasingly scarce. The story follows the journey of Zoe, a young girl who accidentally gets left behind by her parents during a boat evacuation from the island.

Left to fend for herself, the evacuations stop coming and the people who are left become increasingly aggressive and disorganised. When Zoe finds an old boat, she commits to repairing it and making it seaworthy. The main plot involves Zoe's quest to sail after her parents, and the problems she encounters along the way once she discovers the dangerous Eels island.

*She opened her mouth in surprise, but said nothing. Far away on the horizon was a massive, ancient, stone building. It had two tall towers that stuck out into the sky, one at the end and another shorter one in the middle. She couldn't see that there was any land underneath it, and it looked as if it was floating on the sea.*

Led by a boy named Dooby, Eels island is a collection of delusional survivors hanging onto their leader's every word. They call themselves the Eels and don't seem a friendly bunch at all. The ocean is advancing, and so are other groups with similar strange animal names such as the Cats, Pigs and Horses. Zoe must escape and fast.

This environment is vividly realised and the narrative constantly tugs at your heartstrings without resorting to cheap tactics. The endless water helps the reader share a sense of claustrophobia and hopelessness with Zoe as she defies her fate and struggles onward. Her determination quickly earns the reader's respect and her relationships with an old man named William and a young boy named Munchkin are particularly touching.

*She went under again. Longer this time. Strangely, it was much quieter under the water. She no longer felt the cold. She no longer felt anything. Darkness was all around her. She knew she was about to drown.*

*Floodland* is a short book at only 122 pages, but the brilliance of the narrative is perhaps in its brevity. Some explanations are offered for the state of the world, but nothing concrete is committed to. This allows Sedgwick free reign over an entire realm of water and possibilities. The ending, as expected, is powerfully moving.

The idea of people calling themselves after animals may be a little blunt in its depiction of people reverting back to their primal instincts, but it must be remembered that this is a decidedly young adult novel at heart, perhaps more so than the author's later works. For younger readers especially, this will no doubt provide a completely riveting read with a likeable and relatable protagonist. Entirely deserving of the Branford Boase Award, *Floodland* is a stunning debut novel that precluded more literary brilliance to follow.

**By Marty Mulrooney**

<https://alternativemagazineonline.co.uk/2010/12/20/book-review-floodland-by-marcus-sedgwick/>



## Floodland

A new addition to the recent spate of children's novels set in dystopian future worlds, *Floodland* is located in a Norwich which is now cut off from the mainland, surrounded by the sea which has flooded and reclaimed the land after global warming. Faced with rising waters and a dwindling supply of food, Zoe is also desperate to be reunited with her parents from whom she was separated in a scramble for places on the last ship to take members of the marooned population to safety on the mainland. The discovery of a rowing boat affords her an escape route but, reaching another island, she falls into the hands of a wild band of children who jealously guard their territory and have been known to kill intruders.

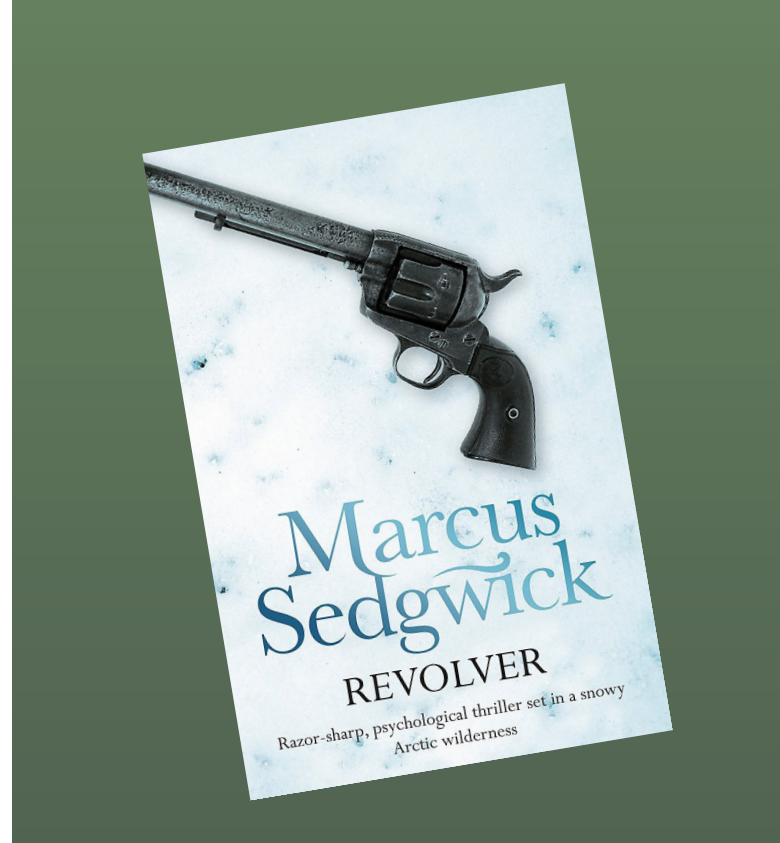
For Zoe, growing up in a society where resources were dwindling, 'other people generally meant trouble'. The Lord of the Flies set-up she pitches up in confirms her worst expectations yet the old man, William, with his strange tales, seems to believe that there is more to living than surviving. Alongside the many betrayals in this novel as people are abandoned to the rising waters there is a recognition that something has been taken away for such inhumanity to flourish. This element of the novel could perhaps have been explored more but Sedgwick has created an engrossing drama with a strong, if watery, sense of place.

Reviewer:

### Rosemary Stones

BfK No. 123 – July 2000

<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/123/childrens-books/reviews/floodland>



## Revolver

In 1910, in a lonely cabin 100 miles north of the Arctic circle, Sig Andersson sits alone with his father's body while his sister and stepmother go for help. A sled crossing on thin ice had proved foolhardy for Einar, an otherwise prudent man, and his son found him half-submerged in icy water, frozen to death. When a menacing stranger bangs on the door, claiming to be Einar Andersson's ex-business partner, Sig wrestles with the possibility that his father had cheated prospectors out of gold in his position as Assay Clerk. As Sig is held captive by the pistol-toting Gunther Wolff, the story flashes back, in short glimpses, to events leading up to this day. Sig relives the mystery surrounding the death of his beloved mother when he was very young and his father's lessons about God and respecting the power of a gun. The tension escalates as the teen calculates his chances of retrieving his father's hidden revolver or escaping from the bearlike intruder, all the while worrying about the return of his unsuspecting sister. The bleak setting and ominous circumstances will draw immediate comparisons to a Jack London tale, but in a more accessible, spare style. Reluctant readers will be riveted by the suspense and the short chapters. Scenes dealing with brutality or the harsh realities of death may not be for sensitive readers but the satisfying ending will dispel some of the gloomy tone. A great addition to survival/adventure collections

**Vicki Reutter**, Cazenovia High School, NY

168 School Library Journal APRIL 2010

[www.slj.com](http://www.slj.com)

## Revolver

This is a book that goes out of its way to pose moral dilemmas for young readers. Sig and Anna are children growing up in poverty in the frozen wastes of North America in 1910. Their father, Einar, has recently died. He leaves his widow, Nadya, the children's step-mother, just two valued possessions, a Bible and a Colt revolver.

A great deal of authorial time and energy is devoted to this gun. Its mechanism and means of use are minutely and lovingly described. The question poses itself: is this healthy reading material for young minds?

A ruthless predator named Gunther Wolff tracks the family down. He claims that as a result of some long-past deal, Einar owed him money. When the family denies knowledge of any hidden gold, Wolff threatens to kill one of them. Sig has just been trained in the use of the revolver. The second moral question arises: is Sig justified in defending his family at gunpoint?

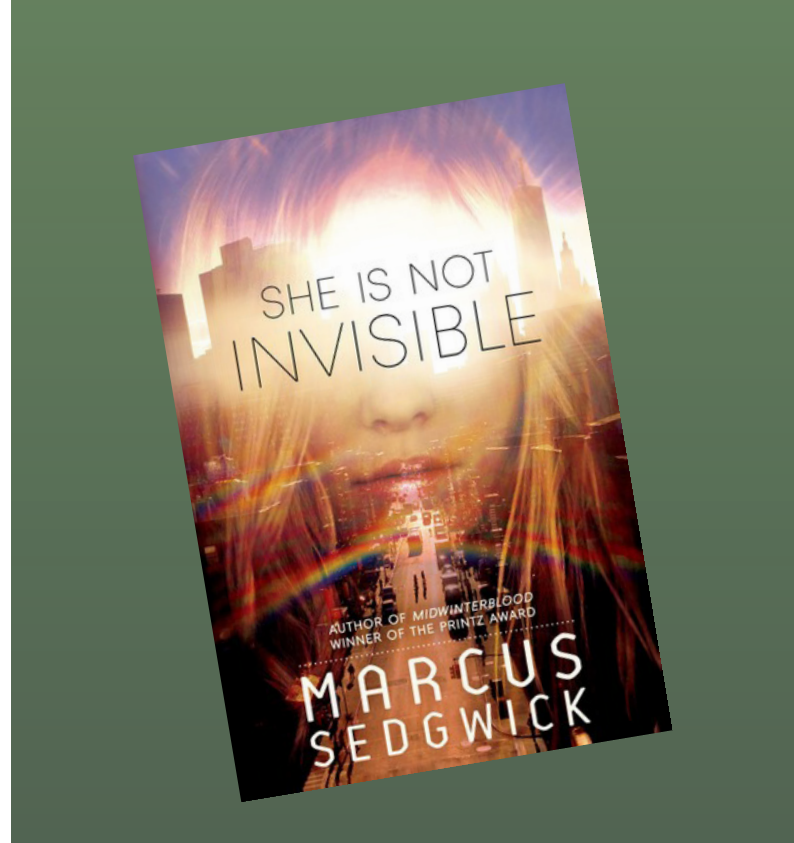
The usual literary criteria for judging a book – narrative skill, characterization, ingenuity in plotting – pale into insignificance alongside the philosophical considerations pressingly relevant to Sedgwick's work. Any writer can make a case that one should be kind to animals and respectful to the old. It is a much harder task to identify a weapon of war as the emotional focal point of a family, and to make the case for its use by a 12-year-old in extreme circumstances. The pillars on which Sedgwick builds his work are meticulous research about weaponry, evocative language about this desolate landscape and the skilful balancing of contradictory arguments. The measure of the achievement is that these linguistic and dialectical skills merge into a whole that continuously sustains the reader's interest, a remarkable achievement.

My only criticism of the book is that it is guilty of prejudice against the disabled. Wolff is missing a thumb. As so often in books, the disability becomes a symbol of malevolence. When will authors learn not to equate physical difference with evil intent?

**Rebecca Butler**

BfK No. 178 – September 2009

<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/178/childrens-books/reviews/revolver>



## She Is Not Invisible

Laureth is sixteen, smart, self-doubting, and blind. She is also desperate to find her missing famous writer father—desperate enough to boost her mother's credit card to buy two plane tickets from London to New York City, forge travel documents, and "abduct" her beloved seven-year-old brother in order to disguise her blindness. Her decision to take these radical steps is based on an e-mail informing her that, even though her father is supposed to be in Switzerland, his writer's notebook has been found in New York. The "road trip" that follows is as full of coincidences and references to the number 354 as said notebook (Laureth's father has been working on a novel about coincidence for far too long, according to her fed-up mother). The unfolding of the mystery is compelling, for the most part, until the end, where it devolves into a remake of *Wait Until Dark* and ultimately fizzles out completely. But Laureth herself is worth the journey. The tricks she uses to negotiate in a sighted world ("I learned to turn my head toward whoever is speaking; I learned to hold my hand out to greet people"), her determination to fight the tendency of sighted people to treat blind people as stupid or deaf or, most insidiously, invisible—all are presented matter-of-factly and sympathetically. Readers will applaud Laureth's believable evolution into a more confident—and definitely more visible—young woman.

**Martha V. Parravano**

May/June 2014 *The Horn Book Magazine* 99

## She Is Not Invisible

There is a certain kind of young adult novel that is very hard to categorise. JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is one example; Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and RJ Palacio's *Wonder* are others. They are first-person stories told by extraordinary characters who stand outside the norms of mainstream society and prompt deep reflections upon it.

*She Is Not Invisible* belongs to this tradition. It is partly a thriller, partly a philosophical meditation on coincidence, but, mostly, it's the story of Laureth: a blind British teenager whose father, a famous author, has gone missing in America. She sets out to find him, taking her seven-year-old brother as a guide. She is not sure this is strictly legal, so she pretends not to be blind as they make their way through Heathrow airport to a transatlantic flight and the streets of New York City.

Sedgwick plunges us deep into Laureth's world, showing the complex routines blind people must undertake to navigate environments built around the assumption of sight. Shaking hands, moving forwards through a queue, placing luggage in an overhead rack - everyday interactions become vast obstacles. Laureth's resourcefulness and courage in overcoming them is inspiring. She is often scared, but never shows it, because that is the only way she can remain visible in this world.

While it is true that blindness by no means defines Laureth, it certainly informs the way in which her story is told. Perhaps the book's biggest accomplishment is a formal strategy so brilliant you may not even notice it. The narration includes not one single visual detail: because it is told by a blind character, everything is evoked by senses other than sight. Sedgwick deploys them so vividly that voices, smells and temperatures become as significant as appearance would otherwise be, while appearance is revealed to be misleading at best.

Sedgwick illuminates the ways in which our vocabulary is inflected by sight, exposing the insistent imagery that privileges it above other senses. So the book reflects on our obsession with the visual, and asks where this leaves people with visual impairments.

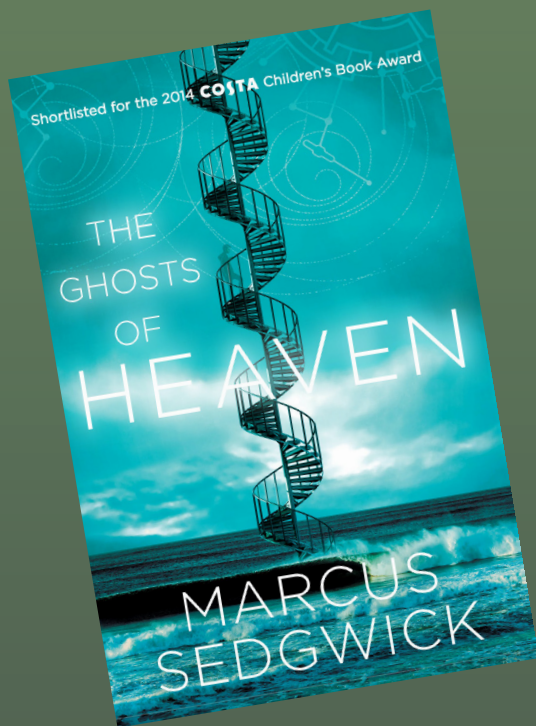
The answer depends partly on the attitudes of the sighted, and there is a whole spectrum of them in the people Laureth encounters. Some are understanding; others appalling, even heartbreaking. But Laureth refuses to be crushed, and her resilience is deeply moving. As she says: "I don't mind being blind. What I mind is people treating me as if I'm stupid."

Sedgwick is best known for novels with a dark, gothic feel, but there is a sense of hope and love here that appears new to his work. It is hard not to see his mirror-image in the figure of Laureth's father: known for his funny books, now trying to write a serious one about coincidence. Extracts from his notebook punctuate and structure Sedgwick's story. They are fascinating, but, ultimately, if you approach *She Is Not Invisible* as a book about coincidence, you may be left with a sense of anticlimax. Laureth's voice is the heart of this book. You don't want to put it down because you don't want to leave her. As with Holden Caulfield, Christopher and Auggie, you can't help but love her – and through her, come to know the world a little differently.

### SF Said

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<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/13/she-not-invisible-marcus-sedgwick-review>



## Ghosts of Heaven

Similar to Sedgwick's Printz Award-winning *Midwinterblood* (2013), four stories relate in elusive ways.

Sedgwick calls these stories "quarters" and encourages readers to experience them in any order. If read in the printed order, they begin with the dawn of time in a story that uses spare verse to describe a cave-dwelling girl who awakens to the world through the spiral shapes she sees as she gathers magic for her people. The second story skips to pre-Enlightenment England and the heart-breaking story of Anna, who is accused of witchcraft after taking up her mother's "cunning woman" mantle. The fictitious journal entries of a Dr. James follow as this early-20th-century psychiatrist forms an unusual relationship with an asylum patient and leaves readers wondering who the true threat to society is. The quartet concludes with a science-fiction thriller in which Sentinel Keir Bowman, awake only 12 hours every 10 years, journeys on a spaceship scouting for new life. What openly draws these stories together is a spiral and spinning symbolism that presents itself through vivid details, from the seemingly mundane to literary references. Individually they conform to conventions; together they defy expectations as they raise questions about humanity and its connections to the universe and one another. Although

Sedgwick gives a nod to teens, this complex masterpiece is for sophisticated readers of any age.

Review Posted Online: Nov. 4, 2014

Kirkus Reviews Issue: Nov. 15, 2014

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/marcus-sedgwick/the-ghosts-of-heaven/>

## Ghosts of Heaven

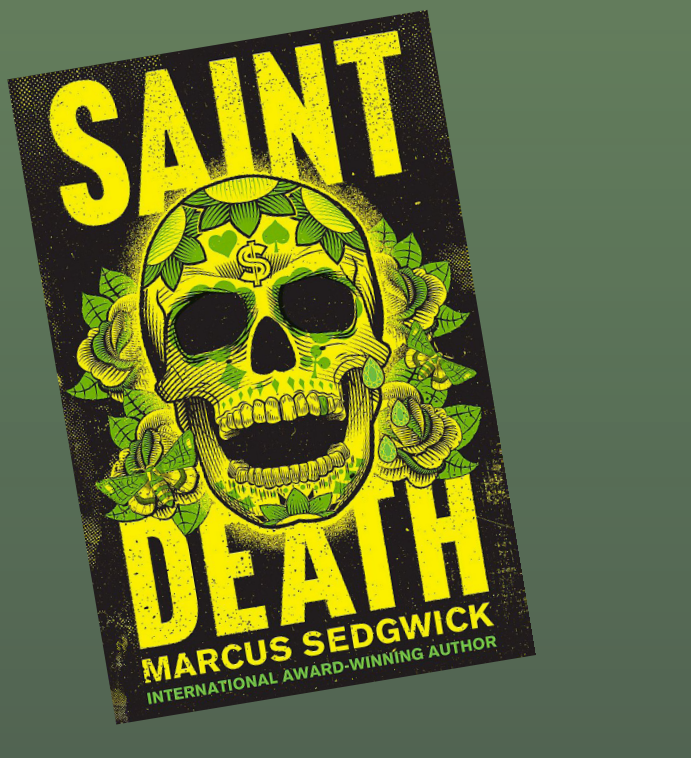
A new book by Marcus Sedgwick is always a treat, and this is a particularly sumptuous one. The book itself is a thing of beauty with a gorgeous jacket of swirling gold spirals on a black background and pages edged in turquoise. The content comprises of four stories or novellas which can be read independently and in any order, all separate but linked by the theme of the spiral and its significance in mythology, science and nature. It is hard to provide a synopsis as a mere précis of plot does not begin to convey what the book has to offer.

The four stories take us from prehistory to the far future: a narrative poem of shamans and magic and the invention of writing; a 17th century witch hunt; a gothic tale of madness, death and love in the early 20th century at the beginnings of modern psychiatry; and a claustrophobic and mind-bending journey from a doomed earth to a space colony. Sedgwick's writing is flawless, not a word wasted or out of place, and the final two stories are particularly strong, laden with atmosphere and tension, absolutely gripping. Although each story can be taken at face value, they have hidden – or not so hidden – depths which require further thought. The book has been extensively, even obsessively, researched, but wears its learning lightly. There are no longwinded expositions on history or significance; all is contained within the narrative. A final coda consisting of a seemingly random string of numbers and letters (a hex number according to a mathematical friend) left me completely baffled, but I am sure it means something.

Definitely a book for rereading, probably several times, to even begin to fully appreciate it. Sedgwick's best yet, a towering achievement

**Lesley Martin**

The School Librarian 63-1 Spring 2015



## Saint Death

A timely but unflinching look at the distressing impact of drugs on the U.S.-Mexico border. Arturo is a teenager living in Colonia de Anapra, a poor neighborhood of Ciudad Juarez. He gets by doing odd jobs and hustling small amounts of cash with the card game calavera. Faustino, an old friend and now a member of a drug gang, has stolen a large sum of money from the gang, so he begs Arturo to help him replace it. Seeing Eva, Faustino's girlfriend, and her baby, Arturo agrees to help. Santa Muerte, the titular St. Death, looms large over the plot, invoked in italicized passages between chapters that act as a Greek chorus. Arturo is reluctant to believe in Santa Muerte, but he lights a candle anyway. Over the course of the night that follows, Arturo plays a desperate game of calavera to redeem the debt, and as the stakes rise, so does Arturo's faith in Santa Muerte. And as Arturo's game inevitably fails him, Santa Muerte watches him closely. Printz winner Sedgwick (*Midwinterblood*, 2013) makes great use of unitalicized Spanish throughout the story, with an English translation following most of the Spanish. His third-person, present-tense narrative combines his characteristic precision of English prose with Spanish punctuation conventions in his dialogue. The use of em dashes instead of quotation marks and surrounding questions and exclamations in the Spanish fashion ("-- What? No way"), while initially distancing for readers unfamiliar with the convention, ultimately creates a dizzyingly immersive experience. Readers will be both devastated and inspired by Arturo's devotion to Faustino and his faith in Santa Muerte.

Date: Feb. 15, 2017

From: Kirkus Reviews

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## Saint Death

Gangs dice with death under the gaze of Mexican folk saint | Set on the borders of Mexico, this powerful thriller explores gangs, drug running and flight to the USA. Faustino dips into drug money he is holding and must replace it – but can he do so in time. Very topical!

Shortlisted for the UKLA 2018 Book Award

A thought-fuelling thriller set in a gang-run neighbourhood near the border of Mexico and El Norte (America). The writing is poetically punchy. Exquisitely formed sentences are fired-off in smarting succession, and the juxtaposition of contemporary totems like Burger King buildings with the likes of folk saint shrines is smartly done. This is a richly layered novel in which important socio-political issues (gangs, poverty, corruption, migration, social divisions and dissonance) are made potently real through Arturo and Faustino's predicaments. And alongside the enlightening Mexico-specific context, there's much that is universal: friendship, loyalty, and searching for a sense of purpose. As paternal figure Siggie tells Arturo, "You just have to find out what it is you're looking for." Pacey and passionate, this truly exceptional book tells a tale that truly needs to be heard.

**Joanne Owen**

LoveReading4Kids

<https://www.lovereadings4kids.co.uk/book/14050/Saint-Death-by-Marcus-Sedgwick.html>

## Marcus Sedgwick : Bibliography (Each section is chronological)

<i>Floodland</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2000
<i>The Dark Horse</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2001
<i>Witch Hill</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2001
<i>The Book of Dead Days</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2003
<i>The Dark Flight Down (sequel to The Book of Dead Days)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2004
<i>The Foreshadowing</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2005
<i>My Swordhand is Singing</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2006
<i>Dead Days Omnibus</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2006
<i>Blood Red Snow White</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2007
<i>The Kiss of Death</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2008
<i>Revolver</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2009
<i>White Crow</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2010
<i>Midwinterblood</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2011
<i>She is Not Invisible</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2013
<i>Doctor Who: The Spear of Destiny</i>	London	Puffin Books	2013
<i>The Ghosts of Heaven</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2015
<i>Killing the Dead</i>	London	Indigo (Orion imprint)2015 (Published for World Book Day)	
<i>Saint Death</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2016
<i>Snowflake AZ</i>	London	Zephyr Books	2019

## Marcus Sedgwick : Bibliography (Each section is chronological)

### Younger Series

#### Early Readers

<i>Cudweed's Birthday</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2011
<i>Cudweed in Outer Space</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2012
<i>Cudweed's Time Machine</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2013
<i>Raven Mysteries</i>			
<i>Flood and Fang (1)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2009
<i>Ghosts and Gadgets (2)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2009
<i>Lunatics and Luck (3)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2010
<i>Vampires and Volt (4)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2010
<i>Magic and Mayhem (5)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2011
<i>Diamonds and Doom (6)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2011
<i>Elf Girl and Raven Boy</i>			
<i>Fright Forest (1)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2012
<i>Monster Mountains (2)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2012
<i>Scream Sea (3)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2013
<i>Dread Desert (4)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2013
<i>Terror Town (5)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2014
<i>Creepy Caves (6)</i>	London	Orion Children's Books	2015

## Marcus Sedgwick : Bibliography (Each section is chronological)

### Graphic Novels

*Dark Satanic Mills* co-written with Julian Sedgwick, illustrated by Marc Olivent & John Higgins, London, Walker Books, 2013

*Scarlett Hart: Monster Hunter* illustrated by Thomas Taylor, London, First Second, 2018

*Voyages in the Underworld of Orpheus Black* co-written with Julian Sedgwick, illustrated by Alexis Deacon, London, Walker Books, 2019

### Picture Books

*A Christmas Wish* illustrated by Simon Bartram, New York, Dutton Books, 2003

*The Emperor's New Clothes* illustrated by Alison Jay, Chronicle Books, 2004

### Illustration

*Riddle* Nick Outremer: Jaufre Rudel and the Countess of Tripoli – A Legend of the Crusades edited by Nick Riddle. Illustrated by Marcus Sedgwick. Fisher King Press 1994

### Adult novels

*A Love Like Blood* London, Mulholland Books, 2015

*Mister Memory* London, Mulholland Books, 2016

*The Monsters We Deserve* London, Zephyr Books, 2018

### Non fiction

*Cowards: The True Story of the Men Who Refused to Fight, London,* Hodder Books, 2003

*Snow*, illustrated by Marcus Sedgwick, Beaminster, UK, Little Toller Books, 2016



## Marcus Sedgwick : Books, Foreign Rights, Translations

<i>Blood Red, Snow White</i>	USA		
<i>Elf Girl and Raven Boy: Dread Desert</i>	Romanian /Bilingual		
<i>Elf Girl and Raven Boy: Fright Forest</i>	Dutch	Romanian / Bilingual	
<i>Elf Girl and Raven Boy: Monster Mountains</i>	Romanian / Bilingual		
<i>Elf Girl and Raven Boy: Scream Sea</i>	Romanian / Bilingual		
<i>Floodland</i>	German	Germany	USA
<i>Midwinterblood</i>	USA		
<i>My Swordhand is Singing</i>	USA	World	
<i>Raven Mysteries: Flood and Fang</i>	Slovak		
<i>Raven Mysteries: Ghosts and Gadgets</i>	Slovak		
<i>Raven Mysteries: Lunatics and Luck</i>	Hungarian	Slovak	
<i>Raven Mysteries: Vampires and Volts</i>	Hungarian		
<i>Revolver</i>	USA	World	
<i>Saint Death</i>	Italian	Korean	USA
<i>She is Not Invisible</i>	German	Portuguese (Brazil)	USA
<i>The Book of Dead Days</i>	USA		
<i>The Dark Flight Down</i>	USA		
<i>The Foreshadowing</i>	World		
<i>The Ghosts of Heaven</i>	German	USA	
<i>White Crow</i>	USA		

## Acknowledgements and Thanks

This dossier was compiled by Ferelith Hordon on behalf of IBBY UK. I would like to thank the following for their help: Marcus Sedgwick and his publisher Hachette Book Group, Michele Gill for the critical statement of his work; Pam Dix, Susan Bailes, Rebecca Butler, Lina Iordanaki, Ann Lazim, Carol Thompson, Michele Gill and Sue Mansfield for their invaluable research, support and hard work.

The dossier was designed by Andy Thomsen.