

**IBBY NCRCL CONFERENCE
SATURDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2015, 2pm**

**UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON
SPEECH IBBY PRESIDENT WALLY DE DONCKER**

Dear Friends,

This is a very special moment for me, one that I know that I will cherish forever because Roehampton always stirs up delightful memories. In 2001 I attended 'The Children's Literature International Summer School' for the first time. The world of children's and youth literature in my own country felt asphyxiating. I needed air – a broader horizon. From the moment I took my first steps as a writer I joined IBBY.

In 2003, I was invited by Kim Reynolds to give a lecture about my literary oeuvre. The attention and encouragement I received from literary scientists, such as Kim Reynolds, Lissa Paul, Rod McGillis and Lynne Vallone, has been motivating me since then. The Roehampton experts told me to keep following general tendencies found in society. Spurred on by their comments, I kept going one step further, always holding up a mirror to my readers.

Here at the University of Roehampton, I leapt forward and acquired a broad insight into the international world of children's and youth literature. The lectures of, amongst others, Gillian Lathey about Erich Kästner, 'Reading Otherways' by Lissa Paul and the session about translations by Emer O'Sullivan, left a profound impact on me.

The direction of my career was set. Nothing could divert me from this track, my horizons broadened and the feeling of being smothered evaporated. Children's Literature International Summer School undoubtedly gave me the 'push forward'. *It radically changed my professional life as a writer and as a reading promoter.* The roots of my international engagement with IBBY also lie here. Therefore, I am forever grateful to the University of Roehampton and the opportunities it has given me.

The theme of today is 'Navigating the process of creating children's books in the 21st century. I believe that IBBY will certainly play a role in this process – more than ever.

IBBY wants to ensure that every child become a life-long reader. We want to confront children with the finest literature.

One of our objectives is battling illiteracy. IBBY takes this battle further than most other NGO's who are concerned with the promotion of learning to read. IBBY wants to promote a reading culture and give every child the opportunity to become a life-long reader and this is only possible if the child enjoys reading. To help this along IBBY focuses on quality literature for children.

I would like to thank Pam Dix and the members of IBBY UK who continue to promote the legacy of Jella Lepman. Your commitment is very important, not only for the UK but also for the IBBY world community.

As a world organization, IBBY has to keep arguing that reading is a basic right for everyone. To be able to read, good materials, such as poetry books, novels, picture books, have to be available to all children. Recently, a librarian told me that we are creating a new elite, by which he meant that children who enjoy reading and devouring books could do so because their parents have the means to buy books. IBBY must continue to advocate for all children to have the right to great literature; this includes children from underprivileged families, immigrant children, refugees, disabled children and sick children. Those who cannot – or may not read are excluded. This is something that IBBY cannot accept.

IBBY protects the rights of the child when needed. When these rights are violated, we will always choose to protect the child. IBBY Italy gave us a perfect example when they chose to help the flood of child refugees arriving on the small island of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean.

More recently IBBY has called on the US Government to care for the thousands of unaccompanied refugee children and families after they cross the Mexican/USA border on their incredible journeys from their war-torn and violent homelands in search of a place to live and grow. Upon their release from the detainment facilities we ask the Government to allow them access to appropriate books, to have contact with Spanish-speaking librarians who are trained in bibliotherapy, and to ensure that their well being is monitored as they are processed through the system. Books and reading save lives and give traumatised children a chance to become whole, contributing citizens as they

grow up.

Amanda Craig wrote in the Independent on 23 June 2015, that we are now living in a Golden Age of children's literature. The First Golden Age started in the 1850s thanks to the increasing status of children.

The Second Golden Age, which fed the imagination of the baby boomers, ran roughly from the 1950s to the 1970s, and is quite different in that it reverberated with a new moral consciousness.

This Third Golden Age is ripe with an extraordinary amount of talent. It is an enormous field, and is publishing vastly more books of all kinds. What might once have been called comics are now graphic novels and are treated seriously. iPads have enabled books to become animated, with sound, music, special pop-up features that young children especially love to explore. The creative potential of books in a visual sense is growing all the time. We have never had so much access to so much information, and we have never had so many ways of enjoying it through story. Really, this is an astounding time in which to be a reader!

"One of the fascinating things about children's literature is that it's a barometer of the times. You can use it to take the cultural temperature. I can't understand why no-one's been interested in this before!" wrote Rosemary Goring her column in the Herald Scotland.

Just like Rosemary Goring, I cannot understand the lack of interest in children's literature. I am often staggered by the fact that some of the leading people in the literary community know so little about children's and youth literature. I am convinced that children's books are a country's best ambassadors!

The World Literacy Foundation (WLF) has warned that illiteracy is "a worldwide crisis" that will cost the global economy 1.2 trillion dollars this year – 1.2 trillion dollars!

The same Foundation has put forward that a global body should be created to manage resources for international literacy initiatives.

Children's early reading skills must be vastly improved to combat illiteracy.

IBBY has been working on this for more than sixty years; the findings of the WLF show that the importance of IBBY will continue to grow.

Thank you for your attention!

