Children’s Literature and the Technological Age: Integrating the New Technologies into IBBY’s World

The new technologies that are reshaping the world we live in present both a challenge and an opportunity to those who work with children’s literature and who strive to educate young people to become thinking and caring individuals. For those of us who believe that books and stories can nourish and educate the child and, in so doing, prepare a safer, more peaceful world in which to grow, the 21st century technologies can sometimes appear to be a threat. How can the book or narrative compete with the computer and the increasing emphasis on early computer use? How can we protect the place of conversation, storytelling, and books shared with loving adults in the strangely busy lives of children who are increasingly told that if they are not computer literate they will fail as citizens of the new century?

These are some of the questions that are a backdrop to this issue of Bookbird and that have preoccupied members of IBBY for a very long time. Most recently, Jostein Gaarder in his brilliant address to the IBBY Jubilee Congress in Basel assured us that the story would survive in spite of the pace and power of the technologies at hand.
But there is another aspect of this discussion which concerns IBBY, which now boasts sixty-seven national sections: the new technologies can be powerful tools that serve the needs and interests of international organizations such as IBBY, and we, like so many others, must integrate and use them effectively. Over the coming years, we will implement an Information Policy whose main goals will be to improve services to members; facilitate communications and collaboration amongst the IBBY membership; encourage the exchange of information and collaboration with international organizations that share common goals, and raise awareness about IBBY’s work and areas of expertise. A key element of these efforts will be to develop an interactive Website in the four official languages of IBBY. This will take time and effort but will ensure that IBBY continues to have its unique place in the world of children’s literature.

It is true that there is a real challenge to put the new technologies in their proper place in the lives of children. But it is also true that we need to put them in their proper place at IBBY. The new technologies are the new tools of communication; they must also be instruments in our continuing efforts to bring children and books together.

*Kimete Basha i Novosejt*

**IBBY Regional Congress:**

**Reading 2003: Havana, Cuba**

In October 2003, IBBY Cuba hosted the regional congress Lectura 2003—Para leer el XXI in its capital city, Havana. This was an extraordinary Congress in honor of the 50th anniversary of IBBY and paid special homage to Leena Maissen who retired in April 2003. Despite many challenges and obstacles, in the end, the Congress was hugely successful. It was also a notable example of how member sections can benefit from close collaboration with their IBBY counterparts, in this case the IBBY sections of Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, and Canada.

Around the Congress, IBBY Cuba also organized several cultural events for delegates. These included a visit to the recently refurbished Museum of Modern Arts, and a moving performance of “Hansel and Gretel” by 500 children from the Ballet Nacional de Cuba’s workshop Catedra de Danza. Also, delegates were given the opportunity to visit two schools in old Havana. There, children greeted their visitors with flowers and offered them a glimpse of their remarkably well-equipped and well-organized school life.

IBBY’s pivotal role in Cuba was made clear during the conference: IBBY Cuba and IBBY Canada have teamed up to jointly publish a series of books. The first book released within this project is called *La Casita Azul* (The Little Blue House) by Sandra Comino of Argentina. As IBBY President Peter Schneck commented in his welcome address: “[In Latin America] there are many active IBBY sections that are doing exciting and ground-breaking work. We can only hope the high standards set here will be those that are enjoyed, one day, by all members worldwide. An example of this dynamism exists in this very meeting. Essentially, a result of the close collaboration between many Latin American and the Canadian National Sections, this conference is an example of how IBBY’s network can be used properly.”

IBBY also held its Executive Committee meeting in Havana before the Congress began. As well as drawing more attention and delegates to the Congress, it provided an instructive experience for the EC to see the hardships faced by some of its member sections on a daily basis. We would like express our deepest and warmest thanks to Emilia Gallego Alfonso, Enrique Pérez Díaz, Aimeé Vega Belmonfe, Maria de los Angeles and Francisco González Casanova of IBBY Cuba, for their warm hospitality and generosity.
On December 13th 2003, IBBY Ireland organized a conference in Dublin called Fighting for Writing. Mary Robinson, Executive Director of the Ethical Global Initiative, delivered the keynote address in which she discussed the problem of the proliferation of small arms and its implications for children’s rights. The other speakers included: Kimete Basha; Jehan Helou from the Tamer Institute, Palestine; Dónal Ó Murchú and Betty Orr from the Salmon of Knowledge creative writing project; and Shpresa Vreto from IBBY Albania. Delegates also heard contributions from: Helene Schär from the Baobab Children’s Book Fund, Basel; Janetta Otter-Barry of Frances Lincoln publishers; Terence O’Malley of Support for Afghan Further Education; and Tom Hyland from the East Timor Ireland Solidarity Campaign. IBBY Ireland’s Susanna Coghlan concluded this full and engaging day. The debates generated by the conference were certainly thought provoking and the conference was heralded as a great success.

In what was her first public appearance as IBBY’s new Executive Director, Kimete Basha spoke about IBBY’s mission as a part of the larger theme that the conference explored. She commented that, If we believe that peace-building is an inherent part of building a better world and that respect and responsibility are its foundations, then we know that we must build patiently and carefully. And if…we understand that the process begins in the imagination, then we fight for writing because we want to educate the imaginations of those who hold the future in their hands.

And so I come to…the story of IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People. Fifty years ago, Jella Lepman saw children emerge from the devastation of a long and bitter war that had spewed new horrors, dark truths about human beings, and she cried. But Jella did not cry very long; she had the survivor’s mettle and hers was a survivor’s response. She focused on the living and their needs; she did not linger, though she understood them, on the sorrows and loss of the young people she found on the streets of the Third Reich’s shattered myths. She brought them books, stories, legends and fables—and they loved it.

Her work then—IBBY’s work today—was a struggle that required that she convince many skeptical bureaucrats that putting good books into the hands of children was just as important, in the end, as giving them food to eat; that it was an elemental part of rebuilding their lives.

IBBY celebrated its fiftieth birthday in Basel last year. That birthday party was a time to applaud Lepman’s legacy and to reaffirm the relevance of her dream in our own troubled world. IBBY’s members come from very different cultural, political and social contexts but share the conviction that books and stories can nourish and educate the child and, in so doing, prepare a safer, more peaceful world in which to grow. They work to promote international understanding through children’s books because they believe that a good story is a story that speaks to every child in the same language.

This work is not easy and it is neither measurable nor generally understood. But it goes on because it is worth doing. It is worth fighting for. And so, IBBY remains one of the key players in the battle for the good book, and it provides a sense of community, dare I say sustenance, to those engaged in the battle for the sake of the book, for the sake of the child, for the sake of the world we know is out there in the hearts of good men and women.
Highlight: New Member: Palestine
Interview with Jehan Helou of the Tamer Institute

At its Bologna 2003 meeting, the Executive Committee approved the application of Palestine for membership in IBBY. In so doing, it put an end to a controversial debate and set the stage for a reconsideration of membership criteria that will be pursued at the next General Assembly in Cape Town, South Africa. Kimete Basha recently met Jehan Helou, Director of the Tamer Institute and President of IBBY Palestine. Highlights of their discussion are included below.

Kimete Basha: Would you briefly tell us what the Tamer Institute is?

Jehan Helou: The Tamer Institute is a non-governmental, non-profit organization. It was established in the first Intifada in response to the closure of schools and to face the challenge of lack of education and illiteracy. It aims primarily to devise means and methods of interactive learning that can empower children and teach values of citizenship. We are best known for our reading campaign which encourages the habit of reading and writing in what is traditionally an oral society. Knowledge is power, and we believe that the best way of providing knowledge is through quality books.

KB: What specifically is your position or role within the Tamer Institute?

JH: I am the Director General. We have a Board of Trustees that supervises the Institute and I supervise all the programs and the team. This team is based in Ramallah but we have coordinators in the different areas, as well as an office in Gaza. We’re lucky that we are able to have community-based centers that provide successful library services with caring librarians we train ourselves, and we are fortunate to be able to publish quality books by Arab writers who would not otherwise have encouragement or support. We provide many of them with training and offer editing services. So we’re trying to work in a holistic way: develop resource centers for children’s literature, provide training, lectures, and workshops for children’s literature in Palestine, and publish the work of Arab writers.

KB: Is the Tamer Institute unique? Are there other organizations that do the same thing?

JH: There is another Institute which serves the very young. There is also a publishing house that does some publishing for children, but it does not have a comprehensive program for children’s literature. So, yes, we are unique in our context.

KB: There was some controversy surrounding Palestine’s membership in IBBY. What was the reaction of your colleagues to this?

JH: It was very difficult for our people to understand why we were not accepted more easily. IBBY is grounded on the idea of providing books for children who are in difficult situations, and to provide them with books that encourage diversity, tolerance, and so on. It is also about fighting for rights. And so it was difficult for many of my colleagues to understand why there was so much reticence about our membership application. In the end, I believe that there was a misunderstanding involved, but the final decision was a wise one, and clearly overcame this.

KB: What is it that you hope to achieve through membership in IBBY?

JH: We are hoping for a real exchange of ideas and thought-provoking encounters with the experiences of others. We want to participate in Jella Lepman’s vision of books as bridges to understanding. But books should also be a tool for liberation and progress, so I think we should think
together about how we can support children in Palestine or anywhere where they are confronted with war and trauma and need our help. This is what we expect. And we hope it will happen. We also hope IBBY will help us build links with individuals and organizations that may offer us know-how, training, quality books, and possibly material support. The Palestinian people are facing challenges and we need to fight back through education, through books, and through knowledge.

New Zealand: The Sport of Reading

Thirteen years ago, in Hamilton, New Zealand, Wayne Mills, who together with Tessa Duder co-founded IBBY New Zealand in 2001, first launched the Kids' Lit Quiz™. During the quiz, four-person teams of 10–13 year olds are asked 100 questions on children's literature. The targeted age-group is deliberately chosen because they are between childhood and adulthood, and as such, read widely. Winners are rewarded with spot prizes, books, book vouchers, and travel to Auckland for the national final. All participants, however, first benefit from an engaging experience where their interest in reading is duly recognized. As Mills himself put it: “It has also fostered reading mileage, stimulated children's knowledge of genre, and rewarded a somewhat solitary activity in positive ways.”

As a person, and New Zealander especially, Wayne Mills is particularly well suited in his role as Quizmaster. First, there is his professional background as Senior Lecturer in language education at Auckland College of Education, and also as President of “Storylines,” and of the Children's Literature Foundation of New Zealand. He is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about children's literature. Second, New Zealand is a country with a small population and small publishing industry. It therefore imports much of its literature and so its literary worldview is wider. This reading eclecticism allows Wayne to write questions that can be asked anywhere in the world.

Since its inception in 1991 when a modest 14 teams competed, the contest has now grown to involve over 348 teams. In 2003, for the first time, the Kids' Lit Quiz™ was also held in the UK. This was sponsored by the Times Educational Supplement (TES) and, with the positive feedback generated, will no doubt become an annual fixture in the future. Mills’s long-term vision is to expand this competition to a worldwide scale. To this end, he will be seeking international sponsors in the future. At present, he is sponsored by Currently Paper Plus Ltd., a New Zealand book and stationary retail chain.

For additional information, Wayne Mills can be contacted at <penway@ihug.co.nz>.

IBBY Documentation Centre of Books for Disabled Young People

Following Nina Askvig Reidarson's retirement in autumn 2002, the IBBY Documentation Centre was transferred to the Haug School and Resource Centre, a special education school in the outskirts of Oslo, Norway. It is now under the responsibility of Heidi Boiesen. Heidi has had a lifelong commitment to books and to her work as a librarian. As she describes: “All my professional life, I have been working in libraries, getting great satisfaction out of finding the right books for the right person, passing on all the wonderful stories and trying to show the children the joy of reading.” In her personal life, she also shared this passion with her own children.

Heidi joined the Haug School and Resource Centre in 1993. At the time, Norway was undergoing heavy social reform where disabled pupils were being integrated into mainstream educa-
tion. However well-intended, in time, these steps were gradually repealed. By 2000–01, the school was rehabilitated and several new wings were built. The school is located in an area of about 6,000 meters square that has been carefully and thoughtfully designed to cater to its pupils’ disabilities. For example, a path through the garden area was paved differently in certain sections to help sight-impeded students find their way. The design creates a haven for the 110, six–fifteen year-old pupils it welcomes.

The school also boasts an elaborate library divided into two sections—one the staff library, and the other fiction and nonfiction for the pupils. The latter includes virtually every book with tactile illustrations or sign language that is published in Norway. It also includes a plethora of picture books, Easy Readers, colorful illustrative works, and books on tape or videos. Now that it is home to the IBBY Documentation Centre, the library benefits from an additional 4,000 titles. The School and Centre will also soon be launching a new project called “Books for Disabled Young People.” Like all its endeavors, this project demonstrates the enthusiasm that Heidi’s team has consistently demonstrated despite continuing financial uncertainties. For the time being, they are dependent on charitable grants for everything from travelling to international book fairs or IBBY Congresses, to even expanding or maintaining the collection.

For additional information, Heidi Boiesen can be contacted at <heidicbo@online.no>.

Heidi Boiesen

Congratulations to Ana Maria Machado

On August 29, 2003, Ana Maria Machado was received at the Brazilian Academy where she now holds seat number 1 which was previously held by the jurist Evandro Lins e Silva. The prestigious Academy only has forty members. In her speech Ana Maria, who is a Hans Christian Andersen Award winner and former President of IBBY (1986–90), paid tribute to Monteiro Lobato, the father of Brazilian children’s literature who himself was never bestowed this honor. Her accession also marked a landmark because it was the first time in the Academy’s history that children’s literature was even mentioned in a welcome speech. IBBY would like to express its heartfelt congratulations to Ana Maria!

Congratulations to the 2004 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award Winner

The 2004 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award was granted to the South African project “First Words in Print.” The project is promoted by the Centre for the Book in Cape Town and sponsored by local institutions and organizations involved in the production of children’s books in South Africa. Through a wide range of partnerships, the project promotes literacy among South African children and their families.
by developing and promoting a national literature in their mother tongue. IBBY would like to thank the generous sponsors of the award—the Asahi Shimbun newspaper company—without whose contribution this award would not be possible.

Obituary: Ena Noel 1910–2003

Few individuals have done more to internationally promote the quality and riches of Australian children’s literature than Ena Noel. It has been said of her, “It is given to very few to become a legend in their own time. Ena Noel is one of the few.” It was Ena’s passionate commitment to life, her vitality, her ability to motivate and enthuse that made her such a memorable force in Australia’s cultural life. Her interests were vast but her major passions were her family, dancing, her career as a teacher and librarian, and her community.

Ena was born into a family of Russian immigrants in Sydney on July 30, 1910. From childhood, she developed an interest in all forms of art and literature, especially music, theatre and dance. As a dancer, she performed, representing Australia, in the festivities around the 1953 Royal coronation.

After her husband’s death in 1966, she fully pursued a career as a teacher-librarian. She set as her higher goal to turn young people into enthusiastic and discriminating readers by working in school libraries. Throughout 1956–1974, she became increasingly renowned for her work. Her professional activities also brought her into active membership of the Library Association of Australia. In fact, many argued that no children’s book event in Australia would be complete without Ena’s presence. Small though she was, her presence was commanding. Ena was also partly responsible for the publication of The New Classics: A Selection of Award-Winning Children’s Books—an invaluable guide to quality in children’s books worldwide. For all this work, in 1984, the General Council of the LAA created a special tribute to her, the Ellinor Archer Award.

In Australia, Ena was affectionately known as ‘Mrs. IBBY’—in 1966, she became President of IBBY Australia, and in 1982–6, served on the Executive Committee. In this role, some of her activities included: organizing an annual Hans Andersen dinner, editing an annual IBBY Newsletter that contained items about children’s literature events around the world, contributing articles to Bookbird and other publications, and regularly being invited to speak at conferences around the world. The acme of her achievements within IBBY came in 1986 when at a conference in Tokyo, the Hans Christian Andersen Award went to Patricia Wrightson, for her writing, and Robert Ingpen, for his illustrations. This was the first time the award went to Australia and the first time both went to the same country.

In 1994, Ena founded her own biennial prize—the Ena Noel Award—to encourage young emerging writers and illustrators. She was also decorated for her services, receiving the Children’s Book Council’s Lady Cutler Award in 1983 and 1986, and the Medal of the Order of Australia.

At a time when Australia’s focus is on children’s literacy and their ability to process literature, and when the need for international understanding and the acceptance of ‘others’ has never been greater, the contribution of Ena Noel will provide an inspiration to all who believe in the universal republic of childhood.

Maurice Saxby
New *Bookbird* Editors

Valerie Coghlan and Siobhán Parkison, both from Dublin, Ireland, have been appointed to a three-year term as editors of *Bookbird*, IBBY’s quarterly journal, to begin with the first issue of 2005. Valerie and Siobhán have worked together as joint editors of *Inis* (formerly *Children’s Books in Ireland*) for the past two years and bring extensive skills and experience as librarians, writers, and lecturers to their new position. Between them, they read English, Irish (Gaelic), French, German, and Danish fluently but are also able to work in Spanish, Italian, Norwegian, and Swedish.

Valerie and Siobhán describe themselves as “literary, opinionated, incisive, reflective, scholarly, articulate, broadminded and visually aware.” These attributes, as well as their commitment to children’s books as literature and wide experience of children’s books organizations, including IBBY, won the approval of the Search Committee, chaired by Alida Cutts. At its October meeting in Havana, the Executive Committee confirmed the recommendation that Valerie and Siobhán be appointed to move *Bookbird* forward into the next phase of its life.

In an interview at the recent IBBY Ireland conference in Dublin, they discussed some of their ideas. Generally, Valerie and Siobhan would like *Bookbird* to reflect more directly the concerns and issues IBBY addresses and to develop a journal with what they called ‘a lighter touch.’ They expressed concern about circulation figures and are determined to widen the journal’s readership. Both are acutely aware of IBBY’s diverse membership and of the fact that not all readers or even contributors to the journal are native English speakers. They also understand that readers come from diverse fields of children’s books and work in very different circumstances. They would like, therefore, to ‘shape the articles towards these diverse readers’ so that *Bookbird* becomes relevant to them wherever they are. Additionally, they want to experiment with a new layout that is ‘interesting to look at and enticing to read’, and are considering dispensing with thematic issues to explore new editorial approaches in future issues.