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# Bookbird

A JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



## Special Issue: Nordic Children's Literature

*Squaring up to Louis Jensen*    *The wonderful adventures of a Swedish classic*  
*The fantasies of Lene Kaaberbol*    *Jockum Nordström and Stian Hole – picturebook artists*  
*Intet and Yatzy: YA books from Norway*    *Torben Weinreich on Danish children's literature*

INTERNATIONAL BOARD ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

IBBY

The Journal of IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People

**Editors:** Valerie Coghlan and Siobhán Parkinson

**Address for submissions and other editorial correspondence:**

bookbirdsp@oldtown.ie and bookbirdvc@oldtown.ie

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*I said it in Hebrew – I said it in Dutch –  
I said it in German and Greek:  
But I wholly forgot (and it vexes me much)  
That English is what you speak!*

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# Editorial

*This special issue on Nordic children's literature, to celebrate the IBBY congress in Copenhagen in September 2008, is edited by a guest editor, Nina Christensen.*

— Valerie Coghlan and Siobhán Parkinson  
Editors, Bookbird

One of the basic tenets of IBBY is that children can benefit from reading about the experiences of others – across national borders, across ethnicity and across languages. This issue of *Bookbird* combines a national, a regional and an international approach to children's literature. It celebrates the IBBY congress to be held in Copenhagen in September 2008, and one of the aims has been to introduce readers to different aspects of Danish children's literature – its history and conditions of production, authorships that represent significant contemporary trends, and current research interests, such as the history of Danish children's literature, the development and refinement of tools for textual analysis and the concept of genre.

It is evident that Danish children's literature is influenced by the Western canon of children's literature. There is also a strong interaction among the children's literatures of Scandinavia, and therefore this issue of *Bookbird* also includes articles on children's literature in Norwegian and Swedish, as well as illustrations from these countries. Many books are translated from one Scandinavian language to another, and it would seem possible to list a number of authors from these countries who function as intertextual references across borders as a sort of 'Nordic' canon of children's literature. One example is Selma Lagerlöf, who in her famous children's book, *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* (1906–07) (published in English as *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*), demonstrates the regional and national identity of a citizen of the world.

The articles gathered here demonstrate the strong similarities between, for instance, Norwegian and Danish young adult fiction, and picturebooks from Norway and Sweden, while at the same time, contributors also root regional tendencies in a broader international context of literature, illustration and characteristics of Western society in general.

Finally, the reader is introduced to the ALMA prize and the institutes for children's literature in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, in order to demonstrate how attention is drawn, in this part of the world, to the importance of literature for children and how knowledge on the subject is gathered and disseminated.

## Guest editor

NINA CHRISTENSEN is director of the Centre for Children's Literature in Copenhagen.



Nina Christensen  
Guest editor



# Between Art and Pedagogy

## The History of Danish Children's Literature

••• *It's the same story everywhere: children's books as we know them developed from books with didactic intentions, and our thinking about children's books still bears traces of that didactic history. Torben Weinreich, whose book on the history of Danish children's literature won the IRSCL award, gives a fascinating overview of Danish children's literature from stern beginnings to a flourishing situation today*

Children's literature has always walked a thin line between art and pedagogy. Today, this is most apparent in the Scandinavian welfare societies where governments have accepted the task of not only teaching children to read but also making sure they actually read books, even in their spare time. In Denmark, approximately half of the children's books sold are bought by school or public libraries.

### **Beginnings**

As in other countries, the first Danish children's books had an obvious pedagogical aim. The first book was called *Børne speigel* [Children's mirror], published in 1568 and written by a former monk who had become a member of the Lutheran church. However, this book was in reality not an original Danish work (which was also the case with many other contemporary Danish children's books). It was based on a book that was very widespread in Europe: *De civilitate morum puerilium* [On civilising the behaviour of boys], written by the philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1526. In the Danish *Børne speigel*, which is

by TORBEN WEINREICH



Torben Weinreich was the first director of the Centre for Children's Literature in Copenhagen and is now professor emeritus of children's literature

***How you keep yourself  
clean, how you mind your  
table manners and how  
you say your daily prayers*** :

just a small booklet of 28 pages, we find a number of short educational poems which are particularly concerned with how you keep yourself clean, how you mind your table manners and how you say your daily prayers. The body parts are described one by one: the nose, the ears, the teeth, the feet, etc; and the book provides pieces of good advice. For example, if you need to blow your nose, you should use a cloth and not ‘smear your clothing’. The richness of detail is considerable. However, the most important message in this rule-bound world is that children should not ‘be forbidden to play’. They should be allowed to ‘sing, dance and jump’. They should, however, keep away from games of cards and dice.

There were plenty of these so-called ‘mirror books’, in Denmark as elsewhere, and this was the case until the beginning of the 19th century. The word ‘mirror’ should be taken literally: children were supposed to ‘mirror’ themselves in the book, in other words, they should behave as the children described in the book. Besides children’s mirrors, numerous other mirror books were published such as girls’, women’s, princes’ and kings’ mirrors.

Not all early Danish children’s books were quite so strict in pedagogical aspiration; however, the children had to learn something, and so *Orbis pictus*, written by the Czech educationalist Johann Amos Comenius in 1658, also became very widespread in Denmark. It contained German, Latin and Danish text to accompany more than 400 pictures, which were supposed to teach children things about ‘the entire world’. More than a hundred years later, the German Joachim Heinrich Campe’s *Robinson der Jüngere* [Robinson junior] from 1779 was widely propagated in Denmark. It was based on Daniel Defoe’s famous *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Just like the original German work, the Danish version contained little conversations between a father and his children after each chapter, where readers could learn what to think of the various incidents, for example, why it was acceptable for Robinson to shoot one of the cannibals chasing Friday even though the Bible says one should not kill.

However, there was a snake in the grass of this pedagogical landscape of children’s books and its name was popular books, such as *En Ræffue bog* (*Reynard the Fox*) and *Aesop’s Fables*, which turned up in Denmark in the middle of the 16th century, at the same time as the first pedagogical books. The stories in such books were often rebellious, the language was grandiose, and they became very popular also among children.

From the very beginning, we are presented with a conflict of interest within children’s literature between lecturing and entertaining. This contrast becomes clearer and clearer at the end of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century where the so-called ‘rental libraries’ turned up in



The front page of the first Danish children's book *Borne speigel*. The text under the title dedicates the book to the citizens of the town, not least the mayor

Denmark. Here, you could borrow a book for a period, for payment. The books from the rental libraries were considered as what today we call pulp fiction by the educated upper class. It was 'worthless' literature, which was like poison to children's souls. Denmark was the first country to pass an education act that made education compulsory for all children; and in 1827, thirteen years after the passing of this act, it was suggested that the fight against this so-called 'poison to the soul' should take place in the schools simply by having special children's libraries with free lending of books.

### **Romanticism**

The 19th century saw the beginning of a new age with a new *Zeitgeist*. In this Romantic period, the perception of the child changed. Earlier, children were considered 'unfinished adults', but now childhood is given a special meaning. The child is closer to nature and God,

***A very good way to  
strengthen family ties was  
by reading aloud*** :

that is, to the original, which in itself has a value. And therefore childhood should also have a special literature, preferably fairy tales, as this particular literary genre shares a quality with the child: It is 'original'. At the same time, we are in a period where the family is strengthened. In a world full of wars, riots and fatal epidemics – which also affected Denmark to a great extent, since it lost a war, went bankrupt and lived through a cholera epidemic – it is important to protect yourself in the home, in other words in the family. And a very good way to strengthen family ties was by reading aloud. This is depicted in 1837 in a little essay written by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard:

*The man comes home after a busy day at the office. He changes his stockings, gets a fill of tobacco, kisses his missus ... and now an incident occurs which is found in most children's books. Uncle Frands who is telling a story – a story which the children have looked forward to all morning, and little Frits and Marie come running clapping their hands .... The mother arranges the children carrying the youngest one on her arm and says: now you be good and listen to what your dear father has to say.*

This is the idyll, inspired by the Biedermeier concept, which affected Danish children's literature throughout most of the 19th century. The Biedermeier concept refers to the imaginary schoolteacher Gottlieb Biedermeier, whose petit bourgeois attitudes were made fun of in the 1850s in the German magazine *Fliegende Blätter*. In fact, children's literature of that time should more correctly be known as *family literature*. Some of the works of this time became classics and are being read today in Denmark, not least the Krohn brothers' *Peters Jul* [Peter's Christmas] (1866) which more than any other book thematises the family idyll in the context of that most idyllic festival: Christmas.

However, in this period something crucial for Danish children's literature happened. In 1835, Hans Christian Andersen published his first tales – 'told for children', as it says on the title page. These tales revolutionised the way stories were told for children, partly by way of their theme, which is often connected with the formation of identity, and partly through the way they are written. Hans Christian Andersen makes use of

***Hans Christian Andersen's  
writing revolutionised  
the way stories were  
told for children*** :

children's language and the language of everyday life and embeds it in an artistic form.

By no means everybody approved of Hans Christian Andersen's tales. The reviewers wrote that the tales did not give the readers 'a moral return', particularly not 'The Princess and the Pea', which was described as 'disgusting'. Andersen's style of writing was characterised as 'motley rubbish', to which Hans Christian Andersen replied: 'Let me follow my nature; why should I follow a path?' And he made no secret of the fact that, though he was writing for children, the stories also appealed to the adult reader.

### ***The battle for the book***

When we get to the end of the 19th century, responsibility for children's reading is rooted in the schools and in the home. The influence of the church, which had had considerable power during the first centuries following the Reformation, had slowly decreased and gradually disappeared completely. However, at the end of the 19th century, a change in children's general conditions occurred in Danish society. Child labour was forbidden by statute and it became possible to forcibly remove children who were neglected by their families. The thinking now was that children should be protected and this was not only the responsibility of the

### ***The book became a medium : among other media :***

individual but also the responsibility of society. At the same time, a new education act was being prepared which was to strengthen the native language, Danish, as a literary subject in schools. The role of the book was further strengthened by the fact that more and more libraries were established in schools (now with government subsidies). A tenacious teacher and publisher started a sort of book club, 'Børnenes Bogsamling' (the children's

book collection), and teachers agreed to sell books from this collection under an arrangement whereby 10 per cent of the profits went to their social funds. The books were sold at modest prices as small booklets which could later on be bound together and become a book. What we see here is how the institutions of society take on more and more of the responsibility for the upbringing of children, also within the field of reading.

And so it comes as no surprise that the teachers are the ones who are discussing children's reading habits. Two prevalent viewpoints are as follows:

1. Reading books is good; however, one should take care that it does not get out of control. Book reading can be 'dangerous' with its one-sided impact on 'the spiritual powers'. 'A child whose life is books lives in reality like a monk in his cell .... A book worm rarely has a personality full of vitality.'
2. Reading books is good, as it ensures that children spend their time wisely. If you start reading books, it will later on in life prevent you from 'running around the streets, visiting pubs, boozing, playing cards and engaging in other types of bad entertainment'.

In any case, the books have to be good. But also here you need to be careful. As a teacher writes: 'A children's book can as such be an excellent book although it lacks artistic content; however, it will always be a bad book if the content has no educational value.'

At the same time as the role of schools and libraries was strengthened (for example, by way of the act on children's libraries in 1931), the book was, on the other hand, facing increasing competition from other media. At the end of the 19th century, film and cartoons had emerged. Radio came later, and in the 1950s Denmark got its first televisions. The special position of the book had weakened; it became a medium among

other media. Many adults, not least teachers and librarians, feared the worst and demanded that society prepare itself for a fight for the book. This fight is concretised in the 1950s in the showdown with cartoons all over the Western world.

***An artificial opposition  
was created between  
different ways of telling  
stories, and the book  
became the 'good' medium*** :

The problem with cartoons was that they had developed from being humorous episodes of daily life to dealing with violence, crime and – not least – war. After the end of World War II, acts of war and violence continued in cartoons. At the same time, all the good energies, for example in the schools, were trying to create a more peaceful world, partly by way of children's literature. Jella Lepman's contribution is a case in point. Cartoons came under pressure. Some countries outlawed certain cartoons and in other countries – including the USA – the industry devised their own codes whose rules governed which subjects were allowed in cartoons.

However, this showdown had a negative side-effect. An artificial opposition was created – an opposition between the various ways of telling stories to children. The book became the 'good' medium, whilst other media were considered 'bad'. This affected not only cartoons but later on also media such as TV, videos/DVDs and computers. We still live with this artificial opposition today.

***On government service***

In Denmark, the showdown with cartoons and other 'substandard' literature resulted in a new library act in 1964, which strengthened not only children's libraries but also school libraries. Standards as to how many books the libraries

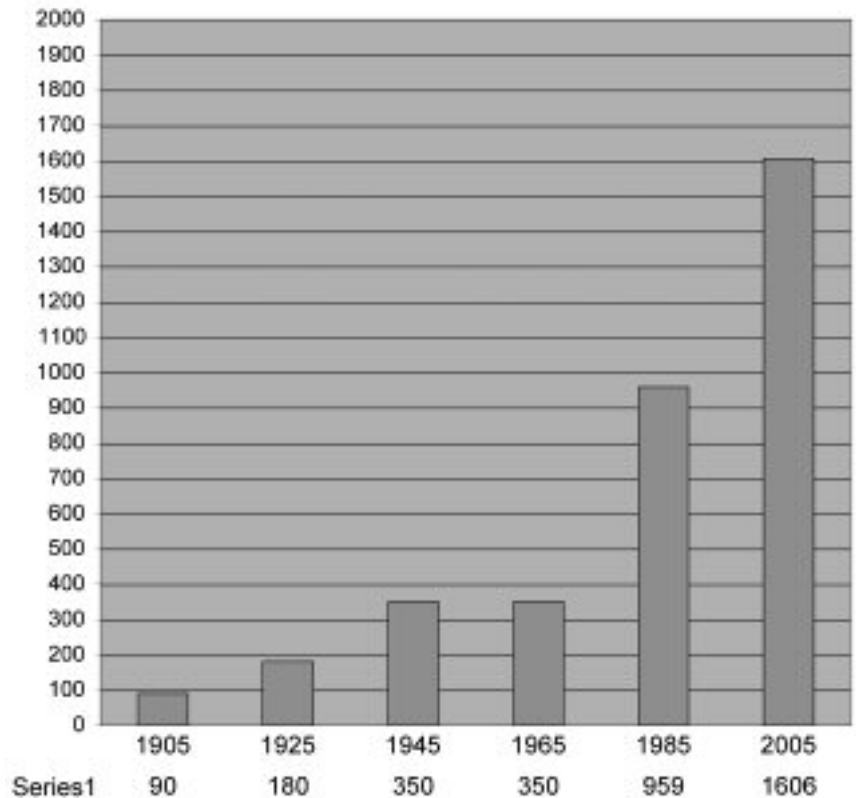
must have on their shelves were laid down, and along with this act came money. The number of children's books purchased in the total library system increased, which affected the Danish children's books market considerably – as regards the number of publishers, the number of books being sold and the substance of the books.

Rather as the church had outplayed its role as the most important provider of children's literature at an early stage, the role of the home and the family was now really being eroded. The government was starting to take over that role, through kindergartens, schools and libraries. In 1970, 500 new children's books were published in Denmark; by 1980, that number had doubled. In 1970, there were 12 million children's books on library shelves; by 1980, the number was 30 million. In 1970, children's and school libraries lent 28 million books a year; in 1980, the number had risen to 75 million.

***Teachers had a clear agenda  
– children's books must  
no longer be exotic*** :

From being something that parents *bought* for their children, children's books now become something you *borrow* at the library. And as it is the librarians and the teachers who buy the books for the libraries, it is also they who decide which books are to be published. Teachers in particular had a clear agenda at this period. Children's books must no longer be exotic – as they were in the beginning of the 20th century. In other words, they should not take place in foreign or past worlds. Children's books have to be about the daily life of modern children and preferably about children's problems. Therefore, the period of 1970–85 also becomes the period of realism in Danish children's literature with books about children and bullying, children and crime and children and divorce.

***Children’s books published in Denmark 1905–2005***



*The number of children’s books published in Denmark in the period 1905–2005 (These numbers refer to fiction only.)*

Although this wave of realism was contested in the 1980s and 1990s when we see an increasing number of historically oriented children’s novels and more and more fantasy – a trend which culminates after the year 2000, closely related to the Harry Potter wave – children’s books remain to a large extent a ‘government service’. A very large part of the quality literature written for children in Denmark would not have been published if the schools and the libraries did not buy them.

***‘Children’s literature is not and will never become art’ – Per Højholt*** :

But the distinctive role of schools naturally revives the discussion about the position of children’s literature between art and pedagogy. At the beginning of the 1990s, this discussion was further stirred up by Per Højholt, a highly esteemed Danish author, when he declared that children’s literature is not and will never become art but will always be pedagogy, because it is an adult who writes to a child with an educating intention. Authors of children’s literature always want something for the children they write to, he says. Children’s literature is a ‘downwards’ literature. This debate had a decisive influence on Danish children’s literature, because after this, many authors of children’s books sharpened their artistic profile, well supported by a new generation of illustrators.

At the same time, something else happened – a thing which turned out to have an important effect on Danish children’s publishing. For a number of years, the funding of children’s libraries was cut back. Their buying power dropped, and thus also the number of children’s books being sold declined. The publishing companies’ natural reaction was to look for new markets and there is only one other market – the so-called ‘private’ market. Once again, the publishing companies had to try to make parents and children buy books – just as they had before the libraries were taken over by the government in the 1960s. Books are again going to be something you own and not just something you borrow at the library. A faithful helper in such a development is the increasing commercialisation of the market, because the books should preferably be sold at a low price in order to have a big circulation.

In Denmark, this means that today we actually have two children’s literature markets: a public market which is declining and a private market which is growing bigger. One side-effect is that we are now experiencing a development within children’s literature which we already know from adult books: the boundary between ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ literature. ‘Broad’ literature is sold in large volumes and generally to private individuals. ‘Narrow’ literature, which often has a more distinct artistic intention, is to a greater extent purchased by schools and libraries.

• ***‘Broad’ literature is sold in large volumes; ‘narrow’ literature, which often has a more distinct artistic intention, is purchased by schools and libraries***

### ***And now?***

What is the situation of Danish children’s literature today? It is first and foremost characterised by great diversity. Many titles are published, more than in most other countries in relation to the size of the population, that is, approximately 2,000 new titles a year, of which fiction makes up about 80 per cent and non-fiction about 20 per cent. Moreover, many different types of children’s literature – as regards genre, theme and target group – are published. Other characteristics of the Danish children’s book market are:

1. Schools and libraries still buy up to half of the copies sold. This is one reason for the abovementioned diversity.
2. The reputation of children’s books is strengthened through the school curriculum, which stipulates that the first to ninth grades should read children’s and youth literature in Danish class. And children’s literature is considered as literature on a par with other literature. When teaching pupils about genres and literary modes, children’s literature is used as an example.

*A characteristic feature in connection with Danish children's literature since the 1970s is the publishing of a number of books which have been considered controversial. One of them is Jon Ranheimsæter's Lars og Lone alene hjemme [Lars and Lone home alone] from 1996. The story attracted a lot of attention as it became part of the European travelling exhibition 'Europe, a dream in pictures?'*



3. Danish media take quite a good interest in children's literature and the reading habits of children. Most large daily papers issue a review of children's books – often several times a week. Additionally, a number of the trade journals discuss children's literature. This also contributes to strengthening the reputation of children's literature.
4. Since the establishment of the Centre for Children's Literature in Copenhagen in 1998, research in children's literature was strengthened considerably. Special mention should be made of the establishment of a master's programme in children's literature and the publishing of a considerable number of works about children's literature, which are particularly aimed at teachers, educationalists and librarians. In the centre, there is also a school for authors for children's literature.
5. Society supports children's literature. Not only do the schools and libraries buy approximately two million books a year, there are also a number of government subsidies, from working scholarships to so-called 'library money'. All Danish authors and illustrators receive a fixed amount each year per book on the library shelves. This payment means that many authors and illustrators are able to live by writing and illustrating.

Danish children's literature is in a time of fermentation characterised by interaction between public and private purchase; between 'narrow' and 'broad literature'; between a commercial and an artistic intention; and between the book media and the modern digital media. Despite great pressure from the new media, still more than half of all 9–12-year-old Danish children read books several times a week in their spare time.

**HELLO EARTH!** is a humorous and challenging picturebook that follows the activities, thoughts and scant sayings of various people and figures from around the world for a period of sixteen hours. On each page there is a picture of a section of the globe, spanning the Earth from Buenos Aires to Kyoto and from the North Pole to Mogadishu.

It can be characterised as a search-and-find book in which the reader is encouraged to search for certain persons, actions or objects in the large, detailed and overcrowded paintings. It is possible to read the book in a variety of ways: for example, systematically, proceeding from the first to the last page; or randomly, opening the book at whatever page you like. In addition, it is possible to read it thematically, following one of the figures from page to page: for example, the small red car that always goes the wrong way or the little child who page after page dreams about numbers and formulae.

**HELLO EARTH!** is perfect for beginning readers, but it is also a wonderful book for anyone who likes geography, cartoon books and absurd humour.

Nina Goga



Anna Fiske

**HALLO JORDA!/HELLO EARTH!**

Oslo: W Cappelen 2007

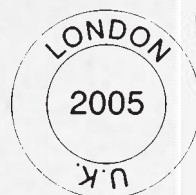
32pp ISBN: 9788202272326  
(picturebook, 4-8)

Born in Copenhagen, Denmark, Toksvig, who now lives in Britain, here presents 'fiction inspired by fact'. The enormous impact of the German occupation of Denmark during World War II is made real to readers by exploring its effect on one family of memorable characters.

Told from the point of view of a young boy who comes to realise that it is immoral to remain passive when innocent people are targeted for discrimination, torture and even death, this book has significance well beyond the events described. The boy's involvement in the Danish Resistance propels this historical novel forward, while showing that average people were willing to put themselves in danger 'because it was the right thing to do'.

An author's note connects the events in this book with the author's family history. Her grandmother was active in the Danish Resistance, and her father often recalled stories of the courageous Danish citizens during World War II.

Myra Zarnowski



**HITLER'S  
CANARY**

Sandi Toksvig

**HITLER'S CANARY**

London: Doubleday 2005

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CT: Roaring Brook Press 2007

191pp ISBN: 9711596432475  
(historical fiction, grades 9+)

# Lagerlöf's Legacy

A Hundred Years of Writing the Nation

by BJÖRN SUNDMARK



Björn Sundmark is senior lecturer in English literature at the Faculty of Education, Malmö University, Sweden, research coordinator at the Department of Culture, Languages and Media, and chief editor of *Educare*



How can it be that an early 20th-century classic Swedish children's text deals with such up-to-the-minute 21st-century concerns as the importance of preventing ecological disaster? Björn Sundmark's reading of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* in light of the work of Peter Kemp on citizenship of the world also looks at new interpretations of this classic book and identifies its true heir not in Sweden but in Denmark

**N**ils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige (1906/7) (published in English as *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*), by Selma Lagerlöf is by general agreement a remarkable work. Charmed by the extraordinary tale, one easily forgets that the story of the spoilt boy Nils, who is – literally – cut down to size by an elf, and then has to travel the length and breadth of Sweden on goose-back before he can return home reformed, is in fact an elementary school reader-cum-geography-book. In 1901, Alfred Dalin, a leading representative of one of the teachers' unions in Sweden, asked Selma Lagerlöf if she could undertake the writing of a new school reader. By that time Lagerlöf was



***The book provides a blueprint for the conception of any nation, a conception that is non-aggressive and self-contained*** :

relationship is characterised by 'creative mimesis' or 'productive imitation', where the teacher represents the historic community and is able to mediate tradition.

This is where *The Wonderful Adventures* comes in. In the construction of a nation, shared language, territory and history are crucial. Sometimes ethnicity/race and religion are played out too. Lagerlöf provides language and territory and some history, but refrains from lauding past glories or proclaiming racial or cultural superiority. This partly explains the book's international success; it provides a blueprint for the conception of any nation, a conception that is non-aggressive and self-contained. When there is chauvinism in *The Wonderful Adventures*, it is almost always regional, not national, and therefore essentially harmless. More importantly, *The Wonderful Adventures* is an evocation of nation as experience.

### ***The Wonderful Adventures as Bildungsroman***



Selma Lagerlöf

According to Lagerlöf's friend and collaborator, Valborg Olander, in her 1918 handbook or teacher's guide to *The Wonderful Adventures*, the novel's deepest aim is to make its readers 'better human beings and good citizens'. Olander goes on to say that Lagerlöf 'strives to instil in tender children a love for their country and its inhabitants, [and] aims at fostering in the young a desire to work for one's country and countrymen'. This is not the same thing as breeding nationalist sentiments; it is, rather, a conscious cultivation of selflessness. The readiness to die for the sake of others is a last desperate resort, but it is surely not a pathological sign; it shows that a person has a highly developed social self.

*The Wonderful Adventures* presents a different story. It is a *Bildungsroman* of sorts, where the protagonist develops and improves through his trials and through his interaction with animals and people. His outer, geographical journey is thus mirrored in his inner, spiritual journey, which changes him from the narcissistic and spoilt brat of the opening pages to a mature, considerate and resourceful young man at the end of the adventurous journey. Again I find the qualities on Kemp's list of *desiderata* articulated: the development of a 'social self' and the ability to feel solidarity with future generations. It should be added too that Nils's solidarity encompasses the animal and natural world as well. There is no mistaking Lagerlöf's concern for nature, and man's relation to it. In one episode, Lake Tåkern is saved from being used for irrigation and the lowering of its water level, and in the 'war of the nun-moths', which threatens Kolmården Forest with defoliation, men are instrumental in preventing an ecological disaster.

***Way ahead of its time, it shows the way towards sustainable development*** :

Moreover, on 'forest-day' a group of children and their teacher take the lead in the reforestation of a mountain which has been ravaged by fire. As I see it, *The Wonderful Adventures* is 'ecocentric' in the way it shows how a boy learns from his interaction with nature and the animal world. Way ahead of its time, and certainly much more than almost anything that is published today, it also shows the way towards sustainable development.

### ***Lagerlöf's utopianism***

I believe passages such as these must be read in the light of Lagerlöf's utopian vision. Lagerlöf clearly believes in progress – technical, economic, social. In this sense, *The Wonderful Adventures* is anything but conservative. Things will be better. Lagerlöf enthuses over sawmills and mines and ironworks. And even the poorest reaches of the country will benefit. Lagerlöf's description of an old peasant woman who dies alone in her Småland farmhouse, abandoned by her emigrant children, does so in the belief that agricultural innovations will make even the infertile marshlands of northern Småland productive. No one will be forced to leave the country in the future because of miserable living conditions and hunger; migration will soon be history. Terrible epidemics, like tuberculosis, will also be a thing of the past. Similarly, Osa and Little Mats, the realistic child heroes of the subplot, teach everyone they meet on their quest to find their father about the ills of consumption (to which they themselves have lost five family members) and how to battle it: 'In every farm house to which they were sent there was always a consumptive. So Osa and Mats went through the country unconsciously teaching the people how to combat that dreadful disease.' Finally, Lagerlöf's utopianism includes the social fabric. A poor girl (Osa) can negotiate with the high and mighty director of the mining company; a king can talk to a peasant; an ethnic Swede can be friends with a Sami. One could say

that Lagerlöf obscures the social reality. I see it rather as part of her utopian discourse: this is the way it ought to be!

### ***Lagerlöf's utopianism : includes the social fabric :***

As for the 'absolute Swedishness' of the text, one could say that it is unfair to accuse it of not being more universal, when after all it was conceived as a book on Swedish geography. More to the point, perhaps, is that although Lagerlöf turns a blind eye to most things foreign (even in the country of Sweden), there is no trace of xenophobia, racism or any supremacist views at all for that matter (neither national nor cultural). In the section about Lapland, the Samis (Laplanders) are given as much/little voice as the locals in any of the other parts of the country. Typically, too, Lagerlöf in this context recounts a legend from the time of the Black Death, where a Sami man and a Swedish woman are the only survivors and choose to live together. One must of course acknowledge that Lagerlöf takes an active part in the 'invention of tradition' often associated with nationalism. But on the whole, her 'inventions' are positive – as in the Sami legend referred to – they articulate and produce an experience – nation as experience.

### ***The Lonely Planet Guide to Selma Lagerlöf***

One way in which Lagerlöf defuses nationalist sentiments is to show how people in each region take pride in what they are and what they have. Thus, Lagerlöf privileges the local and regional and seems to say that they are integral to the nation. In other words, the people and the region define the nation – not the other way round. Instead we find a model for how we could conceive of a world of nations in which we can become world citizens. But who writes wonderful adventures for the Lonely Planet generation of today? Given the

***Lagerlöf privileges the local and regional and seems to say that they are integral to the nation*** :

status of *The Wonderful Adventures* as a classic, and its lasting hold on the imagination, one would expect contemporary children's writers, at least Swedish writers, to return to this central 'Swedish myth' again and again, adapting it to the needs of the 21st century. And if it is true that 'nation' and 'citizen' are again important categories – and a great deal of critical discourse seems to imply just that – then one would anticipate literature that deals with such things.

The prolific children's and YA author Sven Wernström used *The Wonderful Adventures* in various ways in *Den underbara resan: en läsebok om Sverige* [The wonderful journey: a reader about Sweden] (1985). Here Wernström tells the story of the boy Nicke (called 'Thumb') who gets the leading role in a film production of Lagerlöf's *The Wonderful Adventures*. This gives Wernström the opportunity to follow in Nicke's/Nils's footsteps and show what Sweden is like today. However, to the director's distress and frustration, the Sweden of 1985 is a far cry from Lagerlöf's myth of Sweden (which Wernström debunks with gusto). More successful in my opinion is Wernström's looser adaptation of *The Wonderful Adventures* in an earlier book called *Resa på en okänd planet* [Journey on an unknown planet] (1967). In it two teenagers, Agneta and Mikael, befriend two aliens, Blip and Dia, who happen to land in their neighbourhood in an egg-shaped UFO. Blip and Dia take them on journeys to different parts of the world. What they see with their own eyes of social injustice and poverty on these trips, together with Blip's and Dia's naïve questions, teach Agneta and Mikael a great deal about their planet. At the end of the story, one of the teachers is duly impressed by Mikael's grasp of global inequality. Although at times the book reads like a political pamphlet, it does represent an interesting development. Science fiction replaces magic, aliens stand in for talking animals, and the setting is global. Wernström's best attempt at 'mediating tradition', however, is in the critically acclaimed 'Thralls' series (eight books, 1973–81). In it he follows the fate of an underclass known as 'thralls' in a specific part of Sweden through history. History, geography and people are woven together. The perspective is limited to one (under)class of people and to one geographical location (Norrköping).

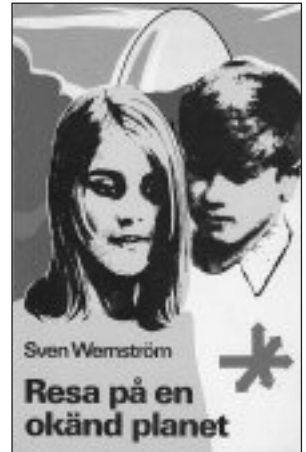


***The nation is the blind spot in children's literature of today*** :

If we turn to Swedish children's books of recent decades, the influence of *The Wonderful Adventures* appears to be very slight indeed. Moreover, the key concepts that I have dwelt on in this article – 'nation' and 'citizenship' – are left virtually unexplored in present-day literature.

The nation is the blind spot in children's literature. The same applies to related concepts like 'local community', 'region' and 'place'. Instead we have numerous books concerned with identity, ethnicity, immigration and the multicultural society. I am referring to books like *I ett annat land* [In another

country] (2006) by Håkan Lindquist, and *Resan som började med ett slut* [The journey that began with an ending] (2006) by Zulmir Becevic. Both of these books deal with the challenges of adjusting to a new country from the perspective of a teenage boy. In *I ett annat land*, Aleks is staying with his family in a refugee reception centre in a rural area of Sweden (Dalsland). Memories and dreams of war and persecution haunt Aleks. But eventually he gets to know some local people. Their experiences and life stories help Aleks come to terms with his own life. Becevic's book, although superficially similar, is written in a different style and mood. Like Aleks, Nino has come to Sweden from war-ravaged Bosnia, but Nino is not as damaged as Aleks – nor as interesting as a character. Nino starts a band, 'Svarta Skallar' ('Blackheads', a racist term of abuse) in the local school to impress the girls. The story is about being a teenager while adapting to new living conditions and not knowing whether you and your family will get a residence permit or not.



### ***Boys, tigers and guardian angels***

Although books like these certainly fulfil a need, it is significant that the mediation of tradition that Kemp presupposes, and that *The Wonderful Adventures* exemplifies, is lacking in recent Swedish children's and YA fiction, and can only be found in a few school textbooks. The best of these is *Pojken och Tigern* [The boy and the tiger] (1986/2002) by Lars Westman; like *The Wonderful Adventures*, it is aimed at children in primary school. And like Lagerlöf, Westman has produced a reader focusing on Swedish geography. In *Pojken och Tigern* a boy from the north of Sweden loses his cat ('Tiger') when vacationing in the south of Sweden. He runs away from his mother and father, leaving a note saying that he will come home as soon as he has found Tiger. This is the beginning of a double odyssey, where the boy (on his skateboard mostly) goes north along the western perimeter of Sweden, while the cat takes a more easterly route. Along the way the two protagonists learn about Sweden and its human and animal inhabitants. Elements of fantasy occur too, as when the boy meets a mining ghost or when he rides a white elk. In the second edition (2002), the language has been modernised and a couple of chapters added. One particularly interesting episode is when the boy meets a girl refugee who has been given permission to hide in a church by the local vicar. As in the books mentioned earlier by Becevic and Lindquist the challenge of multicultural society is highlighted, but here it is given within the context of place and nation. The girl's fate as a refugee, moreover, acts as a counterpoint to the escape, mission and homeward wandering of the boy. In my opinion the book, and its follow-up, *Pojken*

⋮ ***If we want to see such a  
⋮ treatment on an epic scale,  
⋮ we must leave Sweden  
⋮ and go to Denmark***

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*och Tigern – Tidsmaskinen* [The boy and the tiger – the time machine] on a small scale mediates tradition and nation and is intertextually connected with *The Wonderful Adventures*.

However, if we want to see such a treatment on an epic scale, we must venture where not even Nils dared go: we must leave Sweden! We must go to Denmark and to *Lille Lucifer: Historien om Ludvigs fantastiske rejse gennem Danmark* [Little Lucifer: The story of Ludvig's wonderful journey through Denmark] (1996) by the Danish children's writer Bent Haller. Already the subtitle suggests a connection to Lagerlöf's work. An explicit intertextual reference is made halfway through the book when an enchanted golden goose is carrying the hero and his companion Liv through the air:

***One of my relatives once flew all the way to Lapland in the North of Sweden with an elf on his back, said the golden goose, that's how I got the idea.***

***I know that story well, said Liv.***

***Well, there you are, said the golden goose, it's almost like being related to a celebrity.***

With this quote, Haller acknowledges his debt to *The Wonderful Adventures* and to Lagerlöf. As in the prototype, the hero is enchanted and roams every corner of the chosen land. In the course of the journey, the hero matures and learns from the encounters he has with people from

different historical periods. The land, too, is lovingly described and creates an impression in him. All of this is reminiscent of Lagerlöf. Yet, *Lille Lucifer* is far from being a simple copy. Ludvig/Lille Lucifer is half-human, half-angelic/demonic. He is in fact no less than Denmark's guardian angel, although he is unaware of this for the greater part of the book. The hero's incessant skirmishes with the demon Baffomet is what motivates him to go from one place to another. And the characters from Danish history and myth, such as Hans Christian Andersen, Grundtvig, Christian IV, as well as present-day celebrities like Prince Joakim and the football player Brian Laudrup all try to help him (and thus Denmark) against his adversary. Haller must be forgiven if the pace of the narrative sometimes is too rushed (despite its 840-page bulk), and if sometimes present-day Denmark is lost in historical excursions. The creation of a national myth is an ambitious undertaking, not a thing for the faint-hearted. Haller should be duly credited for this. With *Lille Lucifer* he shows that it is possible to mediate tradition and nation in the fictional form made famous by *The Wonderful Adventures*.

### **Lagerlöf's legacy**

*The Wonderful Adventures* established an internationally acceptable template for how one can 'write the nation' imaginatively and non-aggressively. Far from having dated, Lagerlöf's 'notion of nation' is also remarkably in tune with 21st-century ideas about pedagogy and world citizenship. Moreover, Lagerlöf created a 'mindmap' of Sweden that is still very much with us. Today, however, Nils's story is known primarily through easy readers, film adaptations, or used merely as a cultural password. Thus Nils has left his narrative, it seems, and entered the popular imagination. It is also puzzling that *The Wonderful Adventures* is so invisible, relatively speaking, in present-day literary treatments of nation, place and citizenship. Potentially, however, Lagerlöf's legacy remains a force to be reckoned with, as can be seen in Lars Westman's school textbook *Pojken och Tigern* and in Bent Haller's *Lille Lucifer*.

• **Lagerlöf's 'notion of nation' is remarkably in tune with 21st-century ideas about pedagogy and world citizenship**

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# Between International and Local

Lene Kaaberbøl's Fantasy Literature

by ANNA  
KARLSKOV SKYGGEBJERG



*Anna Karlskov Skyggebjerg is an assistant professor at the Centre for Children's Literature, Copenhagen*



••• *Anna Karlskov Skyggebjerg introduces the work of a Danish writer of fantasy for children, some of whose books are also available in English. She locates Kaaberbøl in the tradition of contemporary Anglophone fantasies but also identifies the influence of classic Nordic children's literature on this popular and prolific writer*

Over the last ten years fantasy literature in English has achieved unprecedented popularity among authors, reviewers and readers of children's books. Outside the English-speaking world, the popular fantasy books of JRR Tolkien, JK Rowling and Philip Pullman are read mainly in translation; but some young readers also prefer to read these books in the original, thereby acquiring a linguistic competence which gives them access to an

online global fan community. For the generation of readers now growing up in a country like Denmark, fantasy writing in English naturally sets a norm within children's literature. This is the tradition, in all its multiplicity, which young readers talk about: surveys of reading habits show that young people in Scandinavia favour books like *The Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter series (Øster 2004).

### ***About a third of the children's books published in Denmark are translations from English***

The genre and language dominance of fantasy books written in English in the international market for children's literature has had a natural influence on national children's literatures. In Denmark, the publishing industry has responded to this demand by issuing a large number of translated works within the fantasy genre: about a third of the children's books published in Denmark are translations from English (Beck Rasmussen 2007), and this group includes some of the bestselling titles. In recent years, however, a significant amount of fantasy literature for children has been produced in Danish. This article gives an account of Danish fantasy at the intersection of the international and the local.

#### ***Historical background***

In a marketing context the term 'fantasy' is extremely elastic, but here it denotes a type of literature depicting an encounter between reality and magic. Within the parameters of this article no distinction will be made between fantastic stories and fantasy for children.

The confrontation between real and imaginary can be understood as the clash of several conceptions of reality. According to the psychoanalyst

### ***Fantasy gives expression to taboos and repressed conflicts, and represents unconscious content in symbolic form***

Rosemary Jackson, it is characteristic of fantasy that it gives expression to taboos and repressed conflicts, and that it represents unconscious content in symbolic form. Fantasy can thus be regarded as a subversive genre which gives visibility to the invisible (Jackson 1981).

According to Maria Nikolajeva (1988), the encounter between reality and magic implies the conception of a secondary world which functions as an alternative to the everyday primary world. In Nikolajeva's view, fantasy for children can assume one of three forms:

1. A construction with a closed secondary world
2. A construction with an open passage between a primary and a secondary world
3. A construction in which the action takes place exclusively in a primary world, which is however visited by magical agents from an implied other world

Nikolajeva suggests that fantasy for children has its source in the fairy-tale tradition and that the earliest instances of the genre are closely connected to the fairy tale. In general, fairy-tale elements are often used in fantasy for children; but fantasy is distinguished from fairy tale by its more complicated plot, its more detailed and nuanced presentation of character and its greater openness to interpretation (Nikolajeva 2000).

In Denmark, the historical connection between fairy tale and fantasy for children is perfectly clear, since a number of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales can also be categorised as fantasy for children.



as a forerunner of *The Shamer Chronicles*, as the two series share a number of traits. In both, the secondary world is a feudal society in which power is centred on particular clans. The balance of this society is threatened by corruption and hereditary conflicts between the clans. In both series the protagonist is a plucky but hot-tempered and disaffected adolescent girl who has problems with her family, and in each case the girl is chosen to carry out a task which has far-reaching consequences for her own life and the collective she is part of. The mother–daughter relationship plays a central role, whilst the fathers are absent and yet important figures. Family relations are complex, with whole and half-siblings, stepfathers, uncles and aunts: the family is both a biological unit and an elective community.

The protagonists of both series are at the same time ordinary girls with ordinary problems and chosen children with special abilities, and both series can be read as allegories of adolescence, with its struggles against internal and external demons. This conflict between reality and magic within the main characters themselves may account for the books' great appeal for young readers, who will recognise and identify with such issues as insecurity about one's own abilities, a difficult family life and choices for the future. The action is intense, and as it takes place in an alien universe the problems are distanced from the child reader, who will then not feel encroached upon.

Ethical issues arise in both series, but they are developed fully only in *The Shamer Chronicles*. Here the main character has inherited from her mother the gift of shaming: mother and daughter are able to read other people's guilty consciences and with a single confrontational look make them feel shame. Mother and daughter become involved in solving a serious crime, and when they witness a miscarriage of justice they must risk their lives in the struggle for justice.

Guilt, shame and vulnerability are feelings and psychological states which are discussed in the mindscape, or internal landscape, delineated in these books. According to Maria Nikolajeva (2000), the concept of mindscape can be generally applied to interpret fantasy as a picture of psychological rather than physical realities. Exploits taking place in the secondary world are thus interpreted as symbolising the conflicts taking place within the psyche of the principal character.

***The independent, energetic  
protagonist of the Katriona  
trilogy is certainly related  
to Pippi Longstocking*** :

Lene Kaaberbøl has also published nine books in the W.I.T.C.H. series, part of a mixed media concept launched by the Disney concern. The concept consists of books, animated film, comics and merchandise, with the books kept within the framework of the series (Øster 2006). The plot follows a fixed genre-determined pattern, with a group of teenage girls travelling from a primary to a secondary world in order to save the world from evil and deceit. In both the short, concept-driven W.I.T.C.H. books and the more literary *Shamer Chronicles*, Kaaberbøl has proved to be an author who can write in a form and language which is capable of attracting a broad international target group within the cultural area of the West.

Kaaberbøl's books show that she is acquainted with the conventions of Anglophone fantasy, but at the same time she draws on a Nordic tradition of children's literature, with reference to such authors as HC Andersen and Astrid Lindgren. For example, the independent, energetic protagonist of the *Katriona* trilogy is certainly related to the eponymous heroine of *Pippi Långstrump* (*Pippi Longstocking*): like Pippi, cheeky red-headed *Katriona* breaches social conventions and defies various forms of authority.

*Skyggeporten*

Lene Kaaberbøl's most recent book is *Skyggeporten* [The shadow gate] (2006). This novel, like the W.I.T.C.H. books, makes use of the double-world construction where there is a passage from a primary to a secondary world. Its principal character is Anna, who is almost 14 and without speech.

She lives alone with her father and a strange bird in a ramshackle greenhouse. Anna's mother disappeared seven years ago, and her father has kept the circumstances around her disappearance hidden from the girl. The family owns a large old villa, which Anna thinks may be connected with her mother's disappearance. There she finds a gate leading to the secondary world, Nightland, ruled by the evil Shadow Queen, who steals people's shadows, thus depriving them of independent identity. The Shadow Queen has taken Anna's mother captive.

Anna journeys into Nightland to find her mother, but discovers that she has been chosen to liberate Nightland from the evil queen. Anna finds her mother, but realises that she is more closely connected to the Shadow Queen than she cares for. In fact, Anna has both a biological mother and a foster-mother, two sisters created as each other's opposite; and it is the Shadow Queen who is in reality Anna's biological mother.

Anna relives situations from her early childhood in which she is threatened and punished by her biological mother. However, the good sister takes over the mother role and gives Anna the love she needs. Thus good and evil struggle for possession of Anna, who must accept her biological origins in order to be able to detach herself from them. As Anna grows in self-reliance her voice begins to develop, and as her struggle continues this becomes her most important weapon. The climax of the action in the secondary world is Anna's showdown with the Shadow Queen. Back in the primary world, too, evil is stirring up chaos; but with the help of a boy her own age Anna succeeds in driving out the evil.

***The battles in the  
secondary world can be  
read as an image  
of speechless Anna's  
inner struggles*** :

The battles in the secondary world can obviously be read as a mindscape – that is, as an image of speechless Anna's inner struggles against repressed elements of her childhood. Rosemary Jackson's view that fantasy literature deals with the unconscious and trauma can be applied to *Skyggeporten*. When she arrives at puberty it becomes necessary for Anna to investigate the aspects of

her origins which her father has kept hidden from her. Anna must face up to the demons of her past in order to conquer them. Thus the book takes a Freudian view of personality and the significance of early childhood in the development of emotional blocks. Anna's failure to develop speech is shown to be psychosomatic, and her communication with a boy her own

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age (falling in love) is the therapy which releases her childhood traumas.

Like Lene Kaaberbøl's earlier writings, *Skyggeporten* follows the conventions of fantasy for children: in keeping with many other fantasy protagonists, Anna is a chosen child with special gifts. Her mission is to save the world, and by this means she develops her own identity.

The mother–daughter relationship is a pervasive theme in Kaaberbøl's oeuvre, but in this book it is emphasised even more than previously. The mother figure is split into a light and dark side, and it is the child's task to distinguish positive

from negative and the loving from the anxiety-provoking. The daughter finds strength in her own voice (identity), and kills her biological mother. The mother–child relation which remains depends on both sides making a choice.

As has been pointed out, *Skyggeporten* is a text which draws on the conventions of the Anglo-Saxon fantasy tradition. Nightland's landscapes and beings are reminiscent of Tolkien's secondary world, and the protagonist's mission to save Nightland from destruction is almost a classical trait of the genre. However, it is also possible to regard two texts by HC Andersen as sources, with respect to

both action and theme. *Skyggeporten* is reminiscent of ‘The Snow Queen’: in both texts there is a secondary world ruled by an emotionally frigid queen. These demonic female figures are terrifying because they are anti-mothers disguised as mothers. Though both the Snow Queen and the Shadow Queen claim to be caring, they are actually motivated by egoism, icy reason and the craving for power. Behind these constructions, of course, there is the romantic ideal of the mother as ultimately loving and self-sacrificing. The motif of an existential split is itself similar to that in Andersen’s ‘Skyggen’ [The shadow]

***These demonic female  
figures are terrifying  
because they are  
anti-mothers*** :

(1847), in which a shadow becomes detached from its owner and the two struggle for possession of the man’s identity. Eventually the shadow gains control and finally kills its master. In Lene Kaaberbøl’s book the two mothers battle for power over Anna, and the result is that the loving mother wins access to Anna’s future life.

These resemblances to two texts by Andersen show Lene Kaaberbøl to be a children’s author who has not merely chosen to write in a genre which is popular at the moment but who is deeply aware of genre structures and makes use of the historical origins of the genre as part of her material. Even though an abundance of text messages are sent from smart new cell phones in *Skyggeporten*, the book still contains a romantic reminiscence. It is the child, with her intrinsic intuition and sensitivity, who is able to redeem the world from evil. Allusions to Andersen give support to the Christian/Romantic context, and despite references to a modern multiethnic society *Skyggeporten* promotes a value system which is little different from Andersen’s. Thus Kaaberbøl’s book makes a place for itself between contemporary and historical genre patterns and between international and local models.

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Each new generation deserves to be introduced to the irrepressible Pippi Longstocking, born in 1945 in Sweden. Never showing her age, Pippi has delighted children around the world with her antics and independent spirit since Hans Christian Andersen Award-winner, Astrid Lindgren, brought her to life.

Pippi's child appeal is legendary. Not only are her readers and re-readers entertained by her capers, they also are uplifted by her goodnatured spirit. This bestselling classic is now available in a handsome large-format edition with imaginative full-colour illustrations which perfectly capture the free-spiritedness that caught illustrator Lauren Child's imagination when she was 8 years old. Tiina Nunnally, acknowledged as the preeminent English translator from Scandinavian languages, renders Pippi's story in a straightforward style laced with rhythm and charm. The new edition is available in hardcover, paperback and as an audiobook.

Glenna Sloan



Astrid Lindgren and Lauren Child (illus),  
Tiina Nunnally (trans)

## PIPPI LONGSTOCKING

First US edition: New York: Viking 1950

Current edition: New York: Viking 2007

207pp ISBN: 9780670062768

(fiction, 9–12)

Unnur knows what she wants to eat and what she wants is fish, but in a series of misunderstandings her parents bring her a fish book, a fish toy, even a pet fish while offering her an array of foods that young girls should like. The frustration of a child whose parents refuse to understand what she wants is beautifully rendered. Colours, fonts, backgrounds, and especially the facile expressions all reinforce her emotions.

Unnur is shown in all her glory and hardheadedness, while the parents are only seen in bits and pieces. The contentment on Unnur's face when she finally gets what she craves will warm the soul.

Jónsdóttir is a two-time winner of the Dimmalímm Prize (the Icelandic illustrator's award) and she received the West-Nordic Children's Literature Prize in 2002, together with Andri Snæ Magnason, for their book *SAGAN AF BLÁA HNETTNUM*.

Ernest Bond



Áslaug Jónsdóttir

## ÉG VIL FISK! / I WANT FISH!

Reykjavik: Mál og menning 2007

28pp ISBN: 9789979328476

(picturebook, 3–8)

# Playing with Language and Literature

Louis Jensen's 1001 Stories

by LINE BECK RASMUSSEN



Line Beck Rasmussen is a doctoral student at the Centre for Children's Literature, Copenhagen

En tre hundrede og fireogfyrretyvende gang var der en polsk hund der hed Zxxxwqphktttrtaxgbbhplkzxxxcxzhggg rtsamnjhgfdrtibvdggytrsvmnhjkiytdza swqmlkidtfredhgytrfdeshbvgftrdkjuhgt rfdrestikjhygtfrsmbgkilmnuffdtrkjhngd ddddfgtjunngllkjhgutvbhïpnbhgt revcszewgvbvhgkijbbhvgfctrsdfehkmnbhfvfxdsrvbvjnkjpogggccxds tgycbvhvjhjkjnkjohvgfxcdfhbvjnhbkjnl kjoihhggffcgfxcdstfehbyjhuiuhkijnbjbuyurdfxvbjhhoiuhuf. Men da det er meget besværligt at udtale, og da det tager temmelig lang tid (1 1/2 min.), så kaldte manden bare hunden Vuff

Imagine not-yet-1001 little square stories for children – which in many cases are not really stories at all but something more like quirky poems, and possibly not really (just) for children anyway, and in at least one case not actually square. This is the intriguing and unsettling world of Louis Jensen's hundreds of stories. For all their postmodern playfulness, these stories are, as Line Beck Rasmussen shows, also in a direct line from Hans Christian Andersen and owe at least some of their characteristics to sources as diverse and unexpected as Gogol and Rabelais

Louis Jensen (born 1943) is one of the most established writers for children in Denmark. He debuted as a writer of literature for adults, but he is best known today for his children's literature – a career that started in 1986, when his first children's book *Krystalmanden* [The crystal man] was published. Since then he has written novels, short

***The ‘square stories’ are  
positioned between the  
concrete approach to text  
and free fantasising,  
between a written thematic  
poetical work and an oral  
narrative tradition*** :

stories, picturebooks and a play – and hundreds of short ‘square’ prose stories which are the focus of this article. In these square stories, elements from his entire body of work, both for children and adults, recur: the very letters come alive, and writing itself is thematised; the limits of language and storytelling are playfully explored; and there are recurring story motifs and themes: art, singing, music, instruments, princes, princesses and weddings, landscapes and the four elements – earth, air, fire and water – and objects and ideas such as travel, body parts, angels, the sun and the stars.

***Playing with genres***

The collections of ‘square stories’ are positioned in the middle of Louis Jensen’s work between the concrete approach to text and free fantasising, between a written thematic poetical work and an oral narrative tradition. The ‘square stories’ are also central to his writing in the sense that they constitute a project that unfolds concurrently with other publications. The project started with the first book *Hundrede historier* [A hundred stories] in 1992 and it is Louis Jensen’s plan to write ten books, each containing a hundred stories, and then a last book with only one story. Thus the project could be referred to as 1001 stories. So far, six books have been published – all of them illustrated by Lilian Brøgger. (One of these illustrations is on the cover of this issue of *Bookbird*.) On the back of the first book we find the first story, which is how it all begins:

*Once upon a time there were a hundred stories. And not one of all these many stories had a place to live. Therefore, they had to sleep out at night and manage as well as possible. But then one day, the stories happened to meet inside the head of a man and when they realised they were all homeless, they decided to move into a book together. They named this book **A HUNDRED STORIES** because altogether they were exactly one hundred stories.*

This is a complete little narrative; however, many of the stories are so minimal that they are at the limit of what you could even call a story.

The first thing you notice when reading or just leafing through the books is that all the texts are alike in their graphic expression: they are all rectangular, roughly square, consisting of between six and eighteen lines. And you do not have to read more than one or two stories before it becomes clear that all the stories start with an ordinal number, for example, ‘A thirty-sixth time there was a wild lion named Leo Lux’ or ‘A three hundred and twenty-first time there was a very clever frog’, or ‘A three hundred and third time you could just do whatever you wanted to do.’ Jensen is here playing with the opening formula ‘Once there were/was’, which is a variant of the traditional fairy-tale beginning, ‘Once upon a time’.

***The reader starts reading  
wearing fairy-tale spectacles*** :

With the 1001 stories’ reference to *One Thousand and One Nights* and the use of the fairy-tale openings, the whole project of the hundreds of stories may be described as thematising storytelling, but these are rarely stories of the Aristotelian type, with a beginning, a middle and an end. In these stories, verb tenses often change so they start in the past and end in the present. In some cases, it would be more accurate to describe them as prose poetry –

or prose pieces chopped up to look like verse – rather than as ‘stories’.

Since the stories start with a fairy-tale opening, on the lines of ‘Once upon a time’, the reader starts reading wearing fairy-tale spectacles, so to speak. The content also includes many fairy-tale elements, such as princes, princesses, kings, queens and castles. But at the same time, the stories are parodies of the fairy-tale genre, and they rarely end with ‘...and they all lived happily ever after’, certainly not in the case of this story from *Hundrede nye historier* [a hundred new stories] (1995):

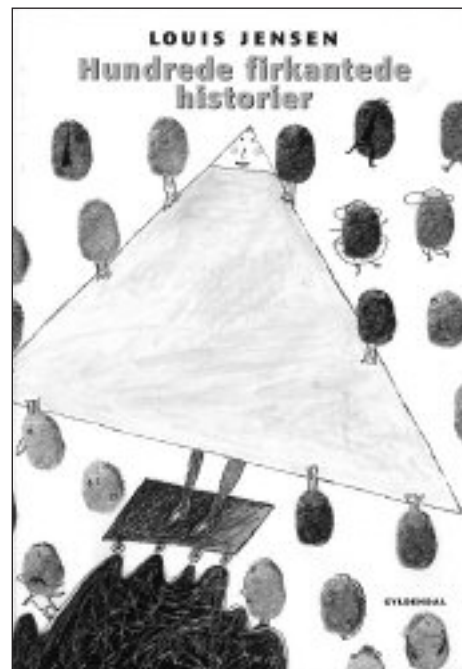
*A hundred and sixty-third time there was a white chicken. Because she was so good at growing vegetables, she was employed as a gardener by the King but then she fell in love with the prince who in return got furious. (How rude! A white chicken falling in love with him! He was after all a real prince!) But the chicken did not care and every day she sent the prince a new-laid egg and the yolk (just imagine!) was all red and shaped like a heart. Finally, the prince ended up giving the chicken a kiss because he thought that she might turn into a princess.*

This is a parody of the fairy tale. The story has a king and a real prince, but no princess, just a white chicken who is in love with the prince. It has no proper ending: The prince kisses the chicken, but it is never revealed whether the chicken turned into a princess and they lived happily ever after or not. The reader is denied the classic ending. The story is open – which is more typical of postmodernist literature than of the traditional fairy tale.

The mention of a ‘real’ prince in the story is reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘The Princess and the Pea’, where the princess is tested for her genuineness, an example of how Jensen uses a characteristic terminology that mimes the great writer of fairy tales. As we shall see later, Louis Jensen plays to a double audience, which is also

***The story about one leg  
marching along the high  
road, ‘Left, Left, Left’,  
alludes to the beginning of  
‘The Tinderbox’:  
‘A soldier came marching  
along the high road: Left,  
right! Left, right!’***

something that is characteristic of Andersen’s work, speaking to both children and adults in a way which often raises the question which audience the texts are written for. At other times, there are more obvious references to Andersen, as in the story about one leg marching with measured steps along the high road ‘Left, Left, Left’, which alludes, with a playful twist, to the beginning of ‘The Tinderbox’ (1835): ‘A soldier came marching along the high road: Left, right! Left, right!’ Jensen’s stories are also often about inanimate objects that come to life, as Andersen did, as for example in the story about a little red Swedish wooden horse, a thimble and a plastic spoon.



Louis Jensen also works with the folktale and other genres such as myths, fables and allegories. Here is an example of a myth: ‘A three hundred and eighty-fifth time words started to grow out of humans’ tongues. When they grew big enough, they came loose and flew out of their mouths. And that is how the first words saw the light of day’ (from *Hundrede firkantede historier* [A hundred squared stories] (2002)).

Some of the stories are nonsense – both as regards language and content – whereas others are pure poetry. Louis Jensen makes use of many traditional genres, but breaks their rules, plays with them and mixes them with an *avant-garde* approach to language, and thus creates his own genre: ‘squared’ stories.

### ***Grotesque fantasising and intertextuality***

The stories are rigorously controlled by the squared shape, but within this framework, Louis Jensen practises freewheeling fantasy, whereby many of the stories take on a life of their own. The stories become agents, as in the first story where all the stories get collected together in the first book. And it is not only the formations of the stories that are grotesque in their expression. The stories also show Jensen’s bent towards grotesque scenarios with hands, feet and noses that are cut off and wander around, such as the nosy nose which is mounted on four wheels and by way of a bag of pepper sneezes along the motorway, e.g. ‘all the way down to Hamburg’. Or a nose which can be removed by the owner if it gets too hot when he eats his soup or which can be used as a teaspoon in his coffee and as a guard dog at night, sitting in a tree outside his window. In such grotesque stories, Jensen is following in the tradition of Gogol, who wrote a story about a nose which disappears and acts as a self-contained part. Here is an example from *Hundrede splinternye historier* [A hundred brand-new stories] (2000):

*A two hundred and eighty-second time a left hand was travelling from Florence to Bologna. It was riding in a coach and was very clever and spoke one language on each finger and German with its thumb. But the left hand did not like the Italian heat. That’s why it was sitting in a zinc tub filled with ice water. Only the thumb was above water and when the coach passed something interesting, the thumb said, in German, what it was. If it for instance saw a dog with spots, it cleared its throat and said: Ein hund mit schwarzen pletten. [‘A dog with black spots’ written in a mixture of Danish and German]*

Jensen makes intertextual allusions not only to Gogol, but also, with his use of exact numbers, exaggeration and grotesqueries, to another classic writer, Rabelais. The classics of children’s literature are also alluded to, not only fairy tales but also Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and Selma Lagerlöf’s *Nils Holgersens underbara resa genom Sverige* (discussed by Björn Sundmark on page 14).

In Louis Jensen’s work, the grotesque and the poetic are mixed. The dirty and physical are confronted and combined with the divine, the spiritual and the sublime.

### ***Language as material***

The squared shape of these texts suggests that they might be categorised as a kind of concrete poetry, as practised by the *avant garde* in the 1960s. Laying poems out in a particular shape, as the concrete poets did, directs the reader’s attention to matters that are usually considered transparent when reading a coherent story: the letters, the words, the page and the book itself.

***The system is broken – but  
even the disruption of the  
system is itself systematic*** :



are often overlooked when we read and put letters together to form words which have a meaning. This is very characteristic of Jensen's particular way of using language. It is not only storytelling that is thematised in these texts, but letters, words and language itself. A similar idea also occurs in his picturebooks *Bogstavskolen* [The letter school] (2003) and *De bortblæste bogstaver* [The blown-away letters] (2003), which are both illustrated by Hanne Bartholin, and the novel *Den kløvede mand* [The split man] (1999).

*A two hundred and sixteenth time a completely new letter turned up. Immediately, it ran into all the words and jogged the letters and shouted that they should make room for it. And since it was extremely rude and pushy, it finally managed to stay after a lot of jostling and pushing and everything in the whole world ended up being called something else. And then things had to change as well. For instance, all noses became approx. 1 cm longer than they used to be.*

In this little story the 'completely new letter' comes alive and acts in a way which subsequently has great effect upon the language. At the same time, the story tells us something about the creation of meaning and the arbitrary relationship between words and things. When an extra letter is added to a word, it has an effect on the thing it describes. In this case, noses grow one centimetre when the word gets an extra letter. We also hear about the tree which can sing 88 languages; the dark hole near Aalborg in the northern part of Denmark where letters are born; the quarrelling man and lady who invent a new language where the words have no meaning, words such as 'ugitril' and 'ecpaszt'. These texts reflect Louis Jensen's delight in language, words and letters and his particular delight in letters which are normally not used very often in the Danish language, such as x, z and q. The use of these letters and many consonants in a row makes it difficult to read some of the stories aloud; at the same time it draws attention to the letters of the alphabet as physical, phonetic and meaningful units and how the alphabet is used to build up words.

Louis Jensen also uses wordplay and puns to draw attention to language. In one story, he describes a *sengehest*. This is the Danish word for bed rail, but it literally means 'bed horse'. This bed rail (horse) gallops around during the night. By taking words literally, Jensen draws attention to the creation of meaning. Jensen plays with the language, but the language also has its own life and plays along.

∴ **Numbers and letters**  
 ∴ **also have a physique**  
 ∴ **and a shape which are**  
 ∴ **often overlooked**

**Louis Jensen's 1001 stories – so far**

All illustrated by Lilian Brøgger and published in Copenhagen by Gyldendal

*Hundrede historier* [A hundred stories] (1992)

*Hundrede nye historier* [A hundred new stories] (1995)

*Hundrede splinternye historier* [A hundred brand-new stories] (2000)

*Hundrede firkantede historier* [A hundred squared stories] (2002)

*Hundrede meget firkantede historier* [A hundred very squared stories] (2005)

*Hundrede helt og aldeles firkantede historier* [A hundred completely and utterly squared stories] (2007)

***A dual audience***

Louis Jensen's special style has oral as well as written characteristics. The stories are clearly related to the oral tradition of stories and fairy tales, and as we have seen, they begin with a play on the traditional 'Once upon a time' opening formula. Jensen draws attention to the oral nature of the stories also by using italics at times to show how to emphasise when reading out loud. At the same time, the stories are written, and they make allusions to their own written or printed nature by the way they use characters and letters.

The oral tradition of storytelling is usually connected with children's literature. By mixing the oral tradition with poetry thematising written

***Jensen both positions  
himself in the tradition  
and at the same time  
breaks out of it***

language, Louis Jensen uses a stylistic device which was previously reserved for adult literature. By mixing and playing with genres and by using intertextual references to fairy tales and to the classics of children's and adult literature, Jensen both positions himself in the tradition and at the same time breaks out of it.

The hundreds of stories are experimental and norm-breaking compared to the prevalent expectations of children's literature. The stories' combination of romance and postmodernism, and their references to classic authors like Gogol and Rabelais – whom most children can be assumed not to have come across – position Jensen at the centre of the discussion about what children's literature is and what it should and can be. If we ask who these texts are written for, the child or the adult who reads the story over the child's shoulder, the answer seems to be that Louis Jensen – just like Hans Christian Andersen before him – writes children's literature which also appeals to adults. At the same time that Jensen's stories continue in a tradition of dual address within Danish children's literature, they are also part of a current context of metafiction as parody or discussion of the relations between fiction, text and reality.

Imagine a present that could fill your days with adventure and spark your imagination! When Frodes' father brings home a fancy new TV, he gets that perfect gift ... not the TV itself but the cardboard box it came in.

The textual narrative in *GAVEN* is very brief with two-thirds of the book being wordless. But when the words stop, Frodes breaks right out of the boundaries of his little room flying his new box into Jessen's imaginative world. The child with an eye for detail will likely notice that all of the toys in Frodes' room and all of the images on the TV become part of the dreamscape through which he journeys.

Jessen's style recalls Anthony Browne's surreal paintings, though the acrylics on white paint are quite distinct and add a chaotic energy to this imaginative romp.

Ernest Bond



Søren Jessen

*GAVEN / THE PRESENT*

Copenhagen, Denmark: Gyldendal 2007

36pp ISBN: 9788702057478

(picturebook, 5-10)

Jenna, a bilingual 5-year-old, and her mother introduced me to Veera, a spirited character the gods endowed with curiosity.

To learn all about farm life, Veera with two friends, Tatu and Patu, explore the various buildings, animals, plants, trees, tasks and routines that make up life on a farm. Tatu and Patu, unique fellows from the Land of Strange, make silly decisions and get into muddled situations, which will appeal to 4- and 5-year-olds. The text, consisting primarily of dialogue, is secondary to the detailed, colourful illustrations.

This is not a storytime book for a group of children; rather, it is a visual delight for a child and adult to explore together. Opportunities for discussion are endless and multilayered. On every double-page spread there are several objects out of place, offering a game-like approach for learning about aspects of the farm. Various farm tools are finely detailed, allowing for in-depth conversation about them.

Other Veera books in print include *Veera in the Kitchen* and *Veera Goes to the Doctor*. I hope that publishers in other languages pick up these gems so children worldwide can meet Veera!

Jeffrey Brewster, assisted by Jell and Jenna Talonen



Aino Havukainen and Sami Toivonen (illus)

*Veera ja maatalon eläimet /  
Veera and the farm animals*

Helsinki: Otavan Kirjapaino 2001

unpaged

ISBN-13: 9789511174486

ISBN-10: 9511174487

(picturebook, 4-8)

# Liquid Limitlessness and Hope

Two Tendencies in Late Modern Nordic Young Adult Fiction

by ÅSE MARIE OMMUNDSEN



Åse Marie Ommundsen is a research fellow at the Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Oslo

••• Åse Marie Ommundsen identifies two  
••• contrasting tendencies in Nordic young adult  
••• fiction: the first, to which she applies the  
••• term ‘liquid limitlessness’, is exemplified in  
••• *Intet*, a prize-winning Danish novel from  
••• the year 2000; the other, more hopeful  
••• tendency is exemplified in a Norwegian  
••• novel, *Yatzy*, also a prize-winner, from 2004

The Polish-English sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2000) uses the idea of ‘fluidity’ as a metaphor to grasp the nature of the present phase in the history of modernity. He calls it ‘liquid modernity’, as it is beyond order and system. Liquid limitlessness wears out the individual and creates pressure. Everything is allowed, apart from claiming that something is not allowed. The modernising of modernity implies that the emphasis shifts from the community to the individual.

Anthony Giddens (1991) used the terms ‘high modernity’ and ‘the late modern age’ to describe this new phase in the history of modernity. Giddens shows how late modern society is marked by individualism, whereby everyone must be responsible for their own life, constantly constructing their own self-identity. Identity is neither deadlocked nor constant, a fact which opens up new possibilities and a new start.

In late modern Nordic young adult fiction two partly contradictory tendencies are especially striking. On the one hand is a tendency towards taboo-breaking, or what Bauman might term liquid limitlessness, with continually stronger and more extreme depictions. The particular example I will discuss here is the prize-winning Danish novel *Intet* [Nothing] by Janne Teller (2000). On the other hand is a tendency towards hope, which allows novels to ‘end with a light’ – a tendency which seems to be especially strong in Norwegian young adult fiction (Ehriander *et al* 2005). This tendency is exemplified in the prize-winning Norwegian youth novel I discuss here, *Yatzy* [Yatzee] (2004) by Harald Rosenløw Eeg.

## ***Intet: a desperate search for meaning***

The young adult novel *Intet* by Janne Teller caused controversy in Denmark when it was published in 2000. It was criticised for being too cruel to be young adult fiction. Even so, it won the Danish Culture

Department's price for children's books (2001). It is a truly shocking book, taboo-breaking and extreme in the cruelties described. Meaninglessness is its theme, as the title implies.

There is nothing that really matters, declares Pierre Anthon, a boy in the seventh grade, and he leaves school. When nothing matters, there is no point in doing anything. His classmates believe he is wrong, but within them a terrible doubt is growing: can he possibly be right? This is how the dramatic events begin in *Tæring*, a small suburb in Denmark. The novel investigates human malice. Thematically it is about the meaning of life, but in their search for meaning the children push things too far. They push themselves and each other towards the brink of the precipice, a precipice of anomie, hatred and revenge. The children lack the ability to draw the line, and therefore break all borders, or rather, all taboos. Pushed to the utmost, paradoxically hatred and malice become the redeeming factors that open up the characters to meaning and significance again.

We have a first-person narrator in Agnes, one of the classmates. The narrative moves on different time levels: the main story is told in retrospect, with ominous prolepses (flashes forward). After the main story is concluded, there is an epilogue in the present tense, which reveals that the story was written eight years after the dramatic events took place.

The boy with the strange name, Pierre Anthon, lives with his father in a collective, together with 'hippies stuck in 68', according to his classmates' parents. 'Pierre Anthon's father and the collective cultivate organic vegetables and exotic religions and are receptive to spirits, alternative medicine and other people.'<sup>1</sup>

After leaving school, Pierre Anthon's occupation is to sit up in a plum tree. He throws plums at his classmates who have to pass by on their way to school, shouting after them that nothing matters, everything is indifferent, life is just a play, a pretence. His classmates become furious with him just sitting and sitting in his tree, discouraging all the others. They decide to disprove his assertion by collecting things that matter. All his classmates are part of the project, which starts off quite innocently as a collection of material things they are fond of but which are not really significant. Agnes, for instance, is forced by the others to sacrifice her green sandals. She can then decide who and what the next classmate shall contribute to the 'heap of significance', placed in the old sawmill. The children soon realise that to convince Pierre Anthon they must collect important things, things that really matter. By collecting things of great significance, they believe they can make Pierre Anthon come down from the plum tree.

• ***Liquid limitlessness***  
 • ***wears out the individual***  
 • ***and creates pressure***



© 2004 Photographer Maren Holthum Nielsen



• ***This novel investigates***  
 • ***human malice***

Pushing one another hard, the group develops a dangerous ability to force every child to sacrifice things of more and more significance. They move from things to animals to human beings and their own body parts. The reader is not spared the gruesome details. Gerda must place her beloved hamster on the heap of significance, Elise the coffin of her dead little brother, which they dig up from the churchyard. Hussain is forced to sacrifice his prayer mat and, indirectly, also his faith – he is no longer considered a Muslim by his father. Kaj must bring the crucified Jesus from his church. A dog is beheaded and put on the heap. The turning point occurs when Sofie is forced to sacrifice her virginity, being raped by Hans. The spiral of increasing malice demands revenge, and Sofie requires that the guitar-player Jan-Johan's right forefinger be cut off. Between the lines we understand that his forefinger had something to do with Sofie's lost virginity. She cuts off the finger herself.

***Gerda must place her  
beloved hamster on the  
heap of significance, Elise  
the coffin of her dead little  
brother, which they dig up  
from the churchyard*** :

What makes apparently normal kids participate in such evil actions? Clearly the problem of evil is the theme here. Even if their intention might have been good, the children's project demonstrates what evil actions human beings – under collective pressure – are capable of doing against others. The overstepped limits and the broken taboos illustrate the notion of liquid limitlessness, providing an example of the youth novel's movement towards the extreme.

But there is also something more: a meaning that the children can sense, but not quite grasp; something they hope exists. After Jan-Johan has

***Is it a disgusting expression  
of cruelty – or is it art?*** :

told the adults, the police come, and the children are grounded. The press asks questions about the heap: is it a disgusting expression of cruelty – or is it art? This results in the children becoming visible and famous. According to the American poet and activist Robert Bly (1996), fame and visibility are today's aim, rather than being kind or good. Adults regressing back to adolescence and adolescents refusing to mature act as hard competitors in their striving to be famous: 'In a sibling society, it is hard to know how to approach one's children, what values to try to teach them, what to stand up for, what to go along with; it is especially hard to know where your children are' (Bly 1996). 'Where have all the grown-ups gone?' Bly asks in his pessimistic cultural analysis, which is also a truly relevant question for the reader of *Intet*.

The famous children in Tæring are still in doubt: is fame really the purpose of life? They are offered 3.5 million dollars to sell the heap to an art museum in New York, but after the sale their success is turned to loss. As Pierre Anthon points out, the heap couldn't hold the meaning, for if it had they wouldn't have sold it. Fame is over, and the children feel that there is no longer any meaning in their actions. Without meaning the children lose their joy in life, and all that is left is hatred. They end up having a terrible fight, which makes Agnes go and get Pierre Anthon. For the first time he is willing to come to the sawmill, and once more, he is pulling the heap to pieces. But after having made fun of everyone's meaning, he, in turn, is attacked. When the others leave the sawmill, he is left, probably already dead. The sawmill burns down the same night.

After the funeral Pierre Anthon's sacrificial death has a redeeming effect. The children collect the ashes from the heap in small matchboxes, and bring

home one each. And when Agnes, eight years after these events, looks into her little box of ashes, she experiences a strange feeling. For, out of the depths of hatred, anger and evil, there is a tender hope that existence has a meaning.

### ***Yatzy: a clean slate and plenty of possibilities***

As adolescence is a borderline age, the young adult novel is a borderline literature, often difficult to distinguish from the adult novel. Thus publishers often leave the choice of audience to the author, who has to take into consideration prestige against other interests. Harald Rosenløw Eeg was given this choice with *Yatzy*, which – having written several versions of it – he wanted to be a youth novel. In the end it won both the Norwegian Culture Department's prize and the Norwegian literature prize, Brageprisen, for the best young adult fiction of 2004.

While *Intet* is a study of evil and children's desperate search for meaning, *Yatzy* is a study of the forces for good in human beings, and how goodness may heal wounds and make a new start possible. *Yatzy* is something unusual as a young adult novel about a boy with a tragic history that leaves the reader feeling optimistic. While *Intet* investigates the evil in mankind, *Yatzy*, on the other hand, investigates every human's possibilities to get back on their feet. Regardless of how low you have been, it suggests, you can always make a new start in life.

Dag Vidar, or Daggi, is the first-person narrator of the story, a boy in the tenth grade who comes from a very difficult family background. The story begins when Daggi is entering his new home and meets what we understand to be his foster family from the following: 'And the lady I just met, but who told me to call them "mum" and "dad" ...' The foster family lives at a small place in the countryside, where all you can see is 'miles and miles of forest'. There is no wind, and no sounds in the forest. But Daggi has a creepy feeling that someone is watching him: 'Scared to death that he may have followed me.' Who this 'he' is and what has happened to Daggi are revealed little by little. The past is haunting him, but the details about what really happened are portioned out bit by bit in the retrospective parts of the novel, indicated by italics. The past is like a mystery which only becomes clear to the reader at the end of the story, but all the time the reader senses that something terrible has happened. The jigsaw-puzzle method as a narrative technique leaves the reader the task of putting the pieces together (Nikolajeva 1996).

The story takes place over a few months at the end of a school year, the last day in the story being the very last day at lower secondary school. The story about Daggi's summer weeks with his new family and at his new



• ***Yatzy is a study of the***  
 • ***forces for good in***  
 • ***human beings***

school is broken up by retrospective glimpses of Daggi's past, telling us about his biological family, life in the city, Oslo, and about violence and a fire. The people that come to be significant for Daggi's development are his foster mother, his enthusiastic little foster brother, Gustav, his teacher Anders, and his classmate and girlfriend to be, Gloria. His firm foster mother, optimistic by nature, tells him that just because people have a certain view of a person like him, he should be careful not to meet their expectations. He should come too early rather than too late, do too much schoolwork rather than too little, and require a higher standard of himself than others do. She gives him a video-camera, so that he can film his new life. With this Daggi starts to construct a new self-identity.

According to Giddens (1991), the decisive thing is the ability to keep alive a story about yourself:

*The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going.*

Daggi isn't predetermined to end up like his biological family, or to fail because of his difficult background. He can start afresh:

*New teachers, new class, new camera ... new school reports. It is a clean slate and plenty of possibilities. I don't have to tell them where I come from, or what has happened.*

Mum shows him a confidence he has never experienced before.

*The thought of them daring to put me in his [Gustav's] room, is quite touching. No-one has ever shown me such confidence. As if it is*

*sort of a principle that they insist on putting me into a shared bedroom with him, even if they know what I have done.*

His teacher, Anders, gives him the opportunity to make a movie about the end of the school year. Daggi videotapes all he experiences and sees, but what he is actually making is a film about his new life – creating a new self-identity.

Daggi is an unreliable narrator, and the reader has to read between the lines to get the story right. For example, after an episode with Gloria, Daggi says he would like to send her a text message to apologise, but he claims it would be a stupid thing to do, so he doesn't. Later in the book, however, Gloria says she got 300 text messages that night, all alike and from the same mobile phone: Daggi's foster father's.

This is the first time Daggi realises that she understands that it is his foster father, and not his real father. One of the truths he has tried to hide is disclosed.

The title *Yatzy* refers to a dice game which he and Gustav play, as Gustav is not allowed to play Gameboy. 'In Yatzy all have an equal chance', Gustav says. In Yatzy the dice decide who is a winner and who is a loser. Daggi is wondering if he can choose something for himself, or if he is only a piece in a big game. He has a feeling that no matter what he does, he will lose: 'It is the Yatzy-feeling. You can't cheat. You can't fake.' He also has a strong feeling that when life is going better for him, it will soon turn round and something terrible will happen.

*Daggi videotapes all he experiences and sees, but what he is actually making is a film about his new life – creating a new self-identity*

Through the love and admiration of his little foster brother, Gustav, the confidence and firmness of his foster mother, and his growing love for Gloria, Daggi is transformed. His understanding of fate changes: 'fate is when your life is put into the hands of others.' The novel is much like a film, written in a language full of metaphors. It is a story of hope and new possibilities, and shows how a cruel start can lead to a future of hope.

### ***The taboo-breaking tendency and the tendency of light***

These two very different young adult novels exemplify two general trends in late modern Nordic children's literature.

'Idyll-phobia' is Sonja Svensson's (1999) term to describe young adult fiction's tendency to seek out the dark, the extreme and the tragic, and this taboo-breaking tendency, with its extreme cruelties and debasements, can be found in the young adult novels of all the Nordic countries (Ehriander *et al* 2005).

The Danish prize-winning novel, *Englekraft* [Angelic force] (2002), by Bente Clod, is another example of an extreme, 'idyll-phobic' and taboo-breaking young adult novel. The main character Taper-Thilde (Thilde the Loser) is a girl in crisis, fighting against darkness and drugs in her harsh life in Copenhagen. In recent Norwegian children's literature also we find several examples of violence, such as Mette Newth's novel on child soldiers, *En plass i verden* [A place in the world] (2006), and Arne Svingen's *Svart elfenben* [Black ivory] (2005), about the cruelties of civil war.

This is not, however, the most dominant tendency in Norwegian young adult fiction. In fact, Norwegian children's literature has, generally speaking, a tendency to be optimistic, to end in hope. Even when it seems to be as dark as can be, the light is still there, as in the tragic story about bullying,

***This taboo-breaking tendency can be found in the young adult novels of all the Nordic countries***

#### **Young adult books**

- Clod, Bente (2004) *Englekraft* [Angelic force]  
Oslo: Omnipax; originally published in Danish as *Englekraft* (2000) Copenhagen: Høst
- Ewo, Jon (2004) *Svart. Og cirka hvitt. En fortelling om urett.*  
[Black. And whiteish – A story about injustice] Oslo: Omnipax
- Newth, Mette (2006) *En plass i verden* [A place in the world] Oslo: Aschehoug
- Rosenløw Eeg, Harald (2004) *Yatzy* [Yatzee] Oslo: Aschehoug
- Svingen, Arne (2005) *Svart elfenben* [Black ivory] Oslo: Damm
- Teller, Janne (2000) *Intet* [Nothing] Copenhagen: Dansk lærerforeningen

*Svart. Og cirka hvitt* [Black. And whiteish] (2004), where the author, Jon Ewo, chooses to write an alternative happy ending to his otherwise bleak story. The last chapter is called: 'It ends with light', an indication, perhaps, of how the tendency of liquid limitlessness and the tendency of hope live side by side in late modern Norwegian children's literature.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> All excerpts from novels quoted here are translated by the author.

**Maria Parr, born 1981, managed to charm most of Norway with her debut book. Accompanied by beautiful illustrations by Bo Gaustad, the book received great critiques, won awards and was nominated for best children's book of the year in the Norwegian Brage award. This story is really worth reading, not to mention reading out loud.**

**Two 9-year-olds deal with friendship, loss, sorrow, joy and laughter. The description of this small place by the sea is filled with such warmth and depth that critics have compared her to Astrid Lindgren. Much like Lindgren, Parr manages to tell the story from the kids' point of view, often with humorous situations. But it also deals with the thoughtlessness of adults when it comes to taking decisions that affect children's lives.**

**The book has so far been translated into Swedish, German and Dutch. Hopefully, everyone – not just kids but also those who still are children at heart – some day will be able to read this truly wonderful children's book in their language.**

**Ragnhild Madsen**



**Maria Parr and Bo Gaustad (illus)**

**Vaffelhjarte/Heart-shaped Waffle**

**Oslo: Samlaget 2005**

**195pp ISBN: 8252166598**

**(fiction, 8-12)**



# From Avant-garde to Digital Images

Collage in Nordic Picturebooks

..... Collage has had a long history in 20th-century  
..... avant-garde movements; more recently, with  
..... the development of digital technologies, it  
..... has developed in new directions. This article  
..... considers influences from avant-garde  
..... collage and painting, the technique of  
..... digital collage and montage and references  
..... to folk art in the work of two Nordic  
..... picturebook artists – the Swedish painter  
..... Jockum Nordström and the Norwegian  
..... graphic artist and illustrator Stian Hole

**T**he introduction of digital illustration techniques in picturebooks represents a fundamental and dramatic change in graphic design within the last fifteen years. Recovering and recycling visual styles and effects from *avant-garde* aesthetics, painting, propaganda and commercials is a tendency that is on the rise. Verbal and

by ELINA DRUKER



*Elina Druker is a teacher and a doctoral student at the Department of Literature and History of Ideas at Stockholm University*

## ***Artistically complex illustration techniques and collages stand as a counterpoint to mass media images***

visual collage – the cutting out and combining of elements from various contexts, as well as different combination techniques – is by no means restricted to modern contemporary design and illustration. Collage and montage had a central position at various times in Western art history, in *avant-garde* movements such as Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism. Photographic collage was the ideal creative medium for new possibilities for the perception and interpretation of what was described as the ‘New World’, a world drastically transformed by the impact of modern technology. Collage was used to search for a new expression but also to question the nature and value of art itself.

Picturebook artists like Helle Vibeke Jensen in Denmark and Svein Nyhus in Norway use a range of visual elements and styles in their illustrations. While Nyhus often merges sheets of printed text or materials with varied textures in his drawings, Jensen uses a range of images that are digitally manipulated. Internationally acknowledged picturebook artists – such as Wolf Erlbruch or Shaun Tan – also use various collage techniques in their work. Artistically complex illustration techniques and collages stand as a counterpoint to mass media images, but are, at the same time, connected to a trend of media crossover with their blend of motifs and artistic styles.

In this article, which focuses on the contrasting work of Jockum Nordström and Stian Hole, the terms ‘collage’ and ‘montage’ will be used to denote a broad aesthetic principle of combination and synthesis. This principle includes a variety of practices ranging from verbal and visual collage to photomontage and digital montage.

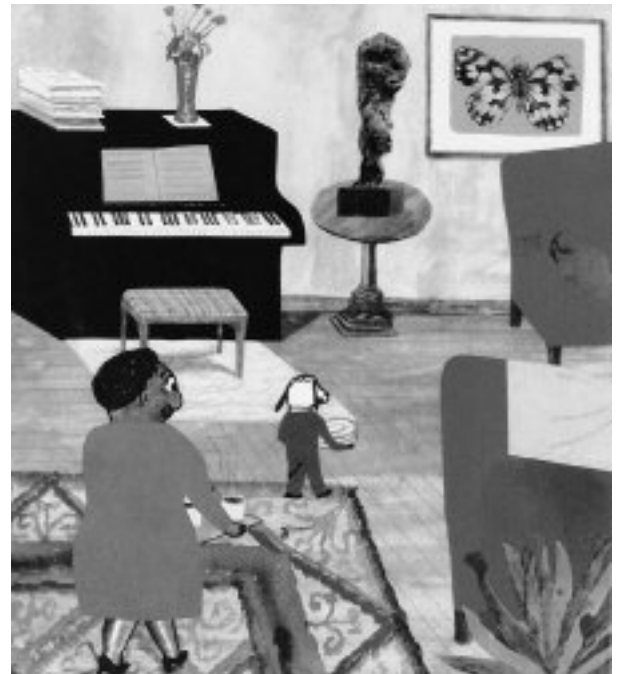
### ***Jazz music, tattoos and surrealism***

The Swedish painter, picturebook author and illustrator Jockum Nordström has written and illustrated a series of stories about Sailor and his dog Pekka. Nordström’s artistically formed picturebooks have found a reading public among both children and adults.

In *Sailor ja Pekka gör ärenden på stan* [Sailor and Pekka busy in town], Sailor wakes up and finds that his shirt is missing. They decide to drive to town to buy a new shirt. While Sailor tries on a new shirt, Pekka the dog visits the hair salon. They meet a sad clown, who has lost his trumpet. Sailor decides to get a tattoo: ‘might as well, since we are in town,’ he declares. The two friends go to the tattoo parlour, and incidentally find the lost trumpet and return it to its owner. Contented with their brand-new haircuts, shirts and tattoos, Sailor and Pekka complete the day by dining together with their friend Mrs Jackson.

This story, in its absurd humour and naivety, is representative of Nordström’s picturebooks. The playfulness and ease of the story is reflected in the





illustrations, distinguished by a naive surrealism. The cartoon-like, slightly clumsy characters and the simplicity of the stories embrace the irrational and childlike.

Nordström uses a series of techniques from complicated cut-paper collages to simple line drawings and photography in his illustrations. His picturebook aesthetics show the influence of film, jazz music, cartoons and popular culture, presenting strangely timeless scenes and characters.

The illustrations include a variety of graphic materials: structural designs, drawings and paintings, maps, wallpapers and photographs. The way the artist constructs his picturebook collages brings to mind *avant-garde* collage techniques from the 1920s. The naive approach relates, however, to a different context within the history of art, the way materials and techniques are combined within both global and Nordic folk art. Folk art is usually created out of whatever material is at hand: illustrations and text from books, newspapers and other printed matter, ornaments from fabrics or photographs. Folk art often consists of diaries and illustrations produced for private use and amusement. This kind of tension between the private and the public, the naive and high art, is characteristic of Nordström's painting in general. Oscillation between the figurative and the abstract, the public and the private, is essential in his picturebook illustrations. In her article 'The Invention of Collage' in *The Futurist Moment*, Perloff (2003) emphasises this quality of imagery within the collage technique that is both private and public: 'To collage

• ***Nordström's picturebook  
aesthetics show the  
influence of film, jazz,  
cartoons and popular culture***

**Picturebooks by Hole and Nordström**

- Hole, Stian (2005) *Den gamle mannen og hvalen* [The old man and the whale] Oslo: Cappelen  
 Hole, Stian (2007) *Garmanns sommer* [Garmann's summer] Oslo: Cappelen  
 Nordström, Jockum (1993) *Sailor ja Pekka gör ärenden på stan* [Sailor and Pekka busy in town]  
 Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren  
 Nordström, Jockum (1994) *Sailor blir sjuk* [Sailor falls ill] Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren  
 Nordström, Jockum (1995) *Sailor och Pekka och Söndagen* [Sailor and Pekka and the Sunday]  
 Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren  
 Nordström, Jockum (1998) *Var är Sailor och Pekka?* [Where are Sailor and Pekka?]  
 Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren  
 Nordström, Jockum (2003) *Varför – Därför. Sailor och Pekka* [Why – that's why. Sailor and Pekka]  
 Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren

***The combination of the  
 figurative and the abstract  
 brings into play a sense of  
 spatial alienation***

elements from impersonal, external sources – the newspaper, magazines, television, billboards – to establish continuity between one's own private universe and the world outside, to make from what is already there something that is one's own.'

Besides assembling different surfaces and visual contexts, Nordström divides the pages in a complex, varied page structure, with a shifting perspective. Altering the perspective from panoramic landscape views to precise close-ups, structured in cartoon-like sequences, controls the pace of the story. The interaction between the two levels of the picture and two different methods of representation is evident also in the way the environments are constructed. Nordström's images often include public housing complexes in modern style, industrial buildings or warehouses. The buildings, as well as the wide, spacious avenues in the town where Sailor and Pekka live, remind us of images of modernist progressive urban city planning, standing for order and harmony, functionality and organisation. Yet, these

images are placed, not in a European landscape, but in an exotic environment, surrounded by palm trees, mountains and romantic ocean views, a scenery that is vague in place and time.

Furthermore, the carefully constructed buildings that function as part of a background setting to the story are sometimes used to form decorative patterns or abstract shapes on the page. They are used as ornamental surfaces instead of three-dimensional forms. There is a shifting in the spatial order, where picture space with depth and flat surfaces are presented in parallel. The combination of the figurative and the abstract brings into play a sense of spatial alienation and a slight instability between the figurative and the abstract. The illusory perception of surfaces and depth is being investigated playfully but at the same time in a strangely precise manner.

Indoors and outdoors become both analogous and at the same time separated. In *Sailor blir sjuk* [Sailor falls ill], Sailor is taken ill and resting in bed. While he is feverish, his dreams are taken over by nightmarish creatures, streams of colours and curious patterns that cover the pages. He remembers old times, sailing overseas. The fading memories are drawn in simple ink and pencil drawings that stand out due to reduced use of colour and the precise technique. The sensuous

and physical approach in Nordström's collages, with its explorations of different perspectives and materials, moves between simplicity and meticulous artistic craftsmanship.

### ***Beginnings and endings***

Quite a different approach is applied by the Norwegian graphic artist Stian Hole. His award-winning picture-book *Garmanns sommer* [Garmann's summer] is a story about a 6-year-old boy Garmann, who is going to start school in a few days. The three old ladies who visit his family every summer will soon be on their way home. The summer vacation is almost over, and Garmann is anxious. He wonders if adults fear new things as well. Are they afraid of anything? He wonders how it feels to grow old and ponders about life and death.

Hole's sophisticated digital illustrations include both fantasy elements and objects from everyday life. In his digital images he combines illustrations and photography from various contexts. Dragonflies, acorns, flowers, toys, pieces of wallpaper and fabric are yanked out of their customary environment and brought together in the images. Although strikingly decorative and elegant in their expression, the emphasis in Stian Hole's illustrations lies not in the flawless technical possibilities of the digital medium, but rather in establishing and playing with the meeting between the separate elements. Both Hole's settings and his characters are distinguished by a slight distortion as two contents merge in his images. A similar kind of distortion is created through the characters' exaggerated body proportions as well as the distinctive facial expressions. The artist has said that he uses features from several different persons when digitally constructing the fictive characters' appearances. Although his collages are mostly based on combinations of photographic images, it is not primarily the documentary qualities that are distinguishing for the expression. The result is an intensely focused and curious visual experience that relies heavily on the tension between different visual contexts.

The compositions are still and motionless, often reflecting the inner thoughts of the main character rather than describing narrative actions. The flat, stationary spatial constructions and the somewhat distorted perspective in Hole's images generate a scenic, almost stage-like expression. This visual



• ***Dragonflies, acorns,***  
 • ***flowers, toys, pieces of***  
 • ***wallpaper and fabric are***  
 • ***yanked out of their***  
 • ***customary environment***

***The result is an intensely  
focused and curious visual  
experience that relies heavily  
on the tension between  
different visual contexts*** :

feature is like what is described by Perry Nodelman (1998) as 'stage pictures' and by Amy E Spaulding (1995) as 'stage sets'.

Time and memories are motifs that Hole had already treated in his first picturebook *Den gamle mannen og hvalen* [The old man and the whale] (2005), where two elderly brothers meet up after years of separation. Beginnings and endings are the main motif also in *Garmanns sommer*, although the main character is a young boy. His thoughts about time, ageing and change are mainly treated through his dialogues with the old ladies. The garden, illustrated with brilliant colours and a visual overload of decorative details, is also fundamental in the story. Garmann has a secret place in the garden. He can crawl inside a large hedge with a hidden



room inside. Hundreds of sparrows live in the hedge and if Garmann sits perfectly still, the birds come and eat the bread crumbs he has brought with him. One day he finds a dead sparrow in this secret place. He decides to put the bird in the ground. In the illustration the sparrows form an ornamental decoration around the boy, who is kneeling down, holding the dead bird carefully in his hands. The voices of the old ladies chatting and drinking coffee further away in the garden mix with the sounds of the birds chirping and singing all around him. The ornamental pattern with the birds becomes both a spatial image of the bush but also an illustration of the sounds surrounding the boy. It is an image of stillness, contemplation and sound, bringing together the motifs of time, ageing and death.

***Disconnected images***

Another way to place different contexts side by side are the framed photographs both in *Den gamle mannen og hvalen* and *Garmanns sommer*, used as connotations of memories and signs of the passing of time. Constructing images of disconnected segments, originally used in the aesthetic systems of Constructivism and Surrealism, is technically seamless in Hole's computer images, but is to a certain extent based on the same effect. Although produced digitally, this interplay of reality and illusion in Hole's illustrations appears to function in a similar fashion as the early collage works of the *avant-garde* photographic collage of the 1920s. The slight distortion and deformation is essential to his method. Instead of utilising the documentary qualities of the camera, the Surrealists used a different approach and saw the camera as a tool of the imagination. But there is a major difference between the Surrealist and the contemporary use of photo-based collages. The Surrealist and Dadaist

***Distortion and deformation  
are essential to Hole's method*** :

collage techniques aimed to shock, to explore the subconscious through unsettling combinations of images. Rather than provoking, Hole's digital collages could be described as simulating or slightly distorting reality, rather than striving to create surreality.

Despite their striking differences, the collage techniques applied in Stian Hole's and Jockum Nordström's picturebooks are based on the effect of 'defamiliarisation', making the reader see common things or familiar situations in unfamiliar or unusual ways. Combinations of different materials and techniques, as well as the play with different levels of pictorial representation, draw attention to the concept of the image and the medium at hand. Images, visual styles and contexts are being recycled and recomposed to create poetic defamiliarisation in Hole's images or to express absurd playfulness in Nordström's books. These collage illustrations, although fundamentally different in their technique, expression and style, seem to have the ability to oscillate between time and space.

The choice of technique also demonstrates how the lines between children's and adult literature, on one hand, and connections between picturebook illustration and other visual media, on the other hand, have become less defined. The frequent use of collage in picturebooks can be explained by the possibilities available in digital illustration techniques and a general trend towards media crossover. It is, however, notable that the overall expression in the contemporary collage in picturebooks is not based on discarding visual traditions, which was the case in the early photographic collage of the *avant garde*, but quite the opposite. Instead, the illustrators turn back to a range of styles and motifs, both within high art and popular culture, and mix them in surprising ways – by combining and manipulating the images, letting unexpected contexts merge and thus creating an expression that is at the same time familiar and new.



• ***These collage illustrations***  
 • ***seem to have the ability***  
 • ***to oscillate between time***  
 • ***and space***

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Incorporating many recent trends in young people's literature as discussed by Kummerling-Meibauer (BOOKBIRD 46(1): 5-13), SEVENTEEN is 'crosswritten' for adults and teens. This 'retrospective novel' focuses 'on the representation of psychological processes, concentration on the characters' inner perspectives, and [is] an attempt to address taboo topics'.

Nilsson's protagonist suggests that 'we're all children of our time' (SEVENTEEN, p 58). Sitting at night with his hospitalised, inebriated son, Goren, an absentee father, relates stories of his own coming-of-age. To illuminate Jonatan's understandings of family generations that have shaped the 17-year-old, Goren depicts his own teen culture of psychedelic drugs, shoplifting (redistributing the wealth) and a commune life of love and peace. He offers up his life to his unconscious son with hindsight and musings on matters close to each of their temperaments: the lethal combination of loneliness and alcohol.

Josefin, Jonatan's girlfriend, and Karin, his mother, comment on the same experiences from harsher perspectives. Goren connects as a father for the first time since he quit the family.

Jinx Watson



Per Nilsson, Tara Chace (trans)

## SEVENTEEN

Stockholm, Sweden: Råben & Sjögren 2002  
First US edition: Asheville, NC: Front Street  
(Boyd's Mills Press) 2007

263pp

ISBN-13: 9781932425895

ISBN-10: 1932425896

(fiction, 12+)

*Halfdan Rasmussen was one of Denmark's best-loved poets. This American edition is dedicated to his memory and to his daughter. A delightful imaginary tale is told in verse which has been skilfully translated into rhyming couplets. The language propels the story forward as it tells of the ladder's encounters with those who ascend it and disappear. The first to climb and vanish is the lean carpenter who constructed the ladder. He is followed by a jolly farmer, a raucous marching band, a chauffeur-driven limousine, as well as assorted others. It is only when a lightning bolt 'hits the ladder with a jolt' that the disappearances cease. The action is reversed and all the characters descent in the end.*

*Full-page vibrant illustrations contain foldout pages that elongate the climbing scenes, and the clever use of split pages enables all parties to reappear en masse at the end of the story. THE LADDER is a perfect read-aloud for young children. The reader should be prepared for shouts of: 'Read it again!'*

Jeffrey Brewster



Halfdan Rasmussen and Pierre Pratt  
(illus), Marilyn Nelson (trans)

## Stigen | The Ladder

Published in Danish by Gyldendal  
First US edition: Cambridge, MA: Candlewick  
Press 2006

36pp ISBN: 0763622826

(picturebook, 4-8)



# Centres for Children's Literature in the Nordic Countries

• *The four major Nordic countries all have institutes dedicated to children's literature.*  
• *Nina Christensen describes these four institutes, their differences and similarities, which can hopefully also serve as inspiration for countries that are considering establishing their own institutes of children's literature*

**D**enmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland have national institutes that were established specifically to work with, and draw attention to, children's literature. The institutes have different obligations in relation to research, they are each based on a collection of primarily national children's literature, and they inform a varied target group about children's literature in different ways.

There is an ongoing discussion whether it is fruitful to perceive books written and published for children as fundamentally different from or basically a part of literature in general. Certain institutional contexts point to children's literature as being 'different'. Publishers specialise in children's literature, parts of public libraries are aimed at children, journals target a readership of specialists in children's literature, and a number of organisations related to children's literature exist, like IBBY and IRSCSL (International Research Society for Children's Literature).

Some would argue that a focus on children's literature as 'different' from literature in general leads to a marginalisation of the field. According to this point of view, children's literature should not be confined, but should form an integrated part of the literary system in general.

by NINA CHRISTENSEN



*Nina Christensen is director of the Centre for Children's Literature in Copenhagen*

## ***Certain institutional contexts point to children's literature as being 'different'*** :

Children's literature would have to live up to the same critical standards as literature in general, be taught at every level of the educational system and receive the same kind of symbolic acknowledgement as literature for adults. From this perspective, special institutions for children's literature can be seen as related to the allegedly low status of children's literature – that is as part of the problem, not as part of the solution. I will argue that this is not the case, by means of a presentation of the activities of the Nordic institutes.

### ***History***

In 1967 the doors to the first institute of children's literature in the Nordic countries opened in Stockholm. The initiative came from different institutions, professional groups and organisations with an interest in children's literature: The University of Stockholm, the Swedish Publishers' Association, the City of Stockholm, the Swedish Writers' Union and the Swedish Association of Illustrators. Thus, the institute was created on the basis of very different professional approaches to children's literature. These different interests are reflected in the aims of the institute, which include to organise a collection of Swedish children's literature and a research and reference library, increase and disseminate knowledge about children's literature, and promote research on children's literature.

Finland was the first country to follow in the footsteps of Sweden and established its own institute in Tampere in 1978. Shortly after that, Norway followed suit and an institute was established in Oslo in 1979. Finally, in 1998, a centre for children's literature was inaugurated in Copenhagen, Denmark.

### ***Organisation***

Finances and a formal organisation are of course preconditions for the activities of such centres. The Finnish institute is based on an independent association with a board which applies for funding to the Ministry of Education and the city of Tampere. The Swedish institute receives the majority of its funds from the Ministry of Education, the Norwegian institute is financed by the Ministry of Cultural and Church Affairs, and the Danish by the Ministry of Science. Unlike the other institutes, the Danish one is defined as a research unit at the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University, Copenhagen. While the Swedish and the Norwegian institutes each have a board that employs the director and ensures that the institutes are run according to the statutes, the director at the Finnish institute is appointed by the board of the association and at the Danish institute by the dean of the School of Education. Each institute receives a different sum, and has a different number of employees: from three persons at the institute in Finland to nine in Sweden.

### ***The libraries***

All the institutes are obliged to collect and catalogue all children's literature published in their country's language, and they all have more than 60,000 children's books in their collection. Furthermore, they collect reference and research literature and have online catalogues (see websites in panel). The collections are open to visitors: people with a professional interest in children's literature as well as students can either study the works at the institutes or, in some cases, take books out to study at home.

***None of the collections at the Nordic institutes is aimed at children*** :



*The building of the first Swedish Institute for Children's Literature, drawing by Bjorn Berg*

Another valuable resource at the institutes is the many journals concerning children's literature available through the libraries. The Centre for Children's Literature in Copenhagen subscribes to fifty different journals in various languages.

None of the collections at the Nordic institutes is aimed at children. This is partly because there is a fine-meshed network of well-functioning public libraries that also serve children in all four countries. The collections of the Nordic institutes are solely aimed at researchers, students and other professionals working with children's literature.

### ***Information services***

It is a common aim of all the institutes to assist professionals who need specialised information on children's literature. People requiring information can be researchers or students, but also journalists, teachers, librarians and other professionals who seek information they cannot obtain through public libraries. All the institutes also organise different activities in order to inform those interested, for instance through seminars, roundtable discussions, conferences or lectures. The employees lecture to students and different professional groups on a number of different occasions, nationally and internationally. In order to do this, some of the institutes employ information officers. The Finnish institute also arranges exhibitions and even has its own collection of illustrations.

Publications also form part of the information activities. The Norwegian institute publishes an annual review, *Årboka* [Yearbook], with articles on trends and statistics concerning Norwegian children's literature. The annual from the Danish institute is called *Nedslag i børnelitteraturforskningen* [New research into children's literature] and presents Danish, Nordic and international research. The Finnish institute publishes the journal *ONNIMANNI* (the name of a fictive character) quarterly, and the Swedish institute *Barnboken – Tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning* [The children's book – Journal of children's literature research] biannually.

Three of the institutes also publish a publication series. In the case of the Danish institute, the series presents research conducted at the institute, for instance PhD theses or empirical surveys of children's reading habits.

### **Research**

In Sweden, the institute is closely connected to outside research, especially to the Department of Literature and History of Ideas at the University of Stockholm, which was among the founders of the institute. Sweden has a strong tradition of research in children's literature, whereas research in the other Nordic countries has been scarce until recently. It is generally possible for students to write an MA thesis on children's literature, but Sweden has by far the longest and strongest tradition of including children's literature in academic studies. The aim of the Swedish institute, like the institutes in Norway and Finland, is to support and promote research in children's literature. The Centre for Children's

***Sweden has by far the  
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academic studies*** :

Literature in Copenhagen is basically different on this point. This institution was set up as a research centre, and the majority of the employees are researchers. Here, it has been one of the primary objectives to educate researchers who will be able to train new researchers and teach students.

### **Education**

The Danish institute is fundamentally different from the others, in that it is closely connected to academic education. In 2004, the first students enrolled in a master's in children's literature, a course of study taken part-time over two years. The students come from a range of professional backgrounds: librarians, school librarians, teachers, teachers at teachers' training colleges, translators, critics, etc. The curriculum comprises four modules: the first concerns the history of children's literature, the second is an analysis of texts for children, the third concerns the dissemination of children's literature and finally an individual master's project. The students – or their employers – currently pay 50,000 kr (about €6,700) for the course. One of the basic principles of the course is that both researchers and practitioners benefit from a continuous exchange between scientifically based and praxis-based knowledge.

### **Schools for authors of children's literature**

Two of the institutes house a school for authors of children's literature. In Denmark, the Centre for Children's Literature opened a school for authors in 1999 and more than one hundred students have now completed the two-year course, which starts every second year. The students are chosen on the basis of written material, and out of eighty applicants twelve form the present student body. The course is organised as a combination of lectures and periods where the students write and receive feedback on their texts.

In 2006, the institute in Norway inaugurated its own 'course for authors of children's and young adult literature'. One year later, a two-year course was launched and fifteen students were admitted out of 66 applicants. The aim is to help students become better writers and to increase awareness of both the challenges specific to children's literature and its literary and social context. In Denmark, many of the students who have participated in the course have had books published and their connection to the School of Authors of Children's Literature is often mentioned in reviews.

### ***Nordic and international collaboration***

The institutes in the Nordic countries have co-operated since they were founded. In 2006, the new director of the Swedish institute, Jan Hansson, set up a meeting of directors and representatives from all four institutes, a meeting which took place in Stockholm. The hope is that such meetings can take place on an annual basis. The Swedish institute also aims to be the international contact forum for children's literature in Sweden.

The institutes collaborate to a greater or lesser extent with sister-institutions in other countries. For instance, the Centre for Children's Literature in Copenhagen cooperates with Institut für Jugendbuchforschung at the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt and with the Children's literature unit at the School of English at the University of Newcastle.

### ***Marginalisation or integration?***

This description of the institutes might paint a picture of active, well-organised, solid institutions. This is indeed my impression, but it is also a fact that most of the institutes also face huge challenges on a regular basis. Many conflicting interests are at play in the institutes, and some diplomacy is required to develop the institutions

## ***Are institutes like these : an advantage for the : field, or are they a sign of : marginalisation of : children's literature? :***

and at the same time protect the identities of the institutes and the tasks they were set up for.

Are institutes like the ones in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark an advantage for the field, or are they a sign of marginalisation of children's literature? Certainly, the creation of a centre in Denmark has made it possible to educate and qualify researchers as well as a number of professional groups working with children's literature. None of the existing Danish institutions would undertake this task. It is my impression that research at the Centre for Children's Literature has contributed to a legitimising process, not only in relation to research in children's literature, but through the master's in children's literature also, bringing increased professional attention among librarians, school librarians, teachers and others.

## ***All the major newspapers : in Denmark now review : children's literature and : write about children's : literature on a regular basis :***

It is also my impression that it is an advantage to the public to have an institution committed to knowledge of the area. Journalists have easy access to information and experts, and good contact with the media is a big advantage when the centre has information to share with a broad audience. One sign of an increased public interest in children's literature is that all the major newspapers in Denmark now review children's literature and write about children's literature on a regular basis. This public interest underlines a need for further

### Websites

Centre for Children's Literature in Copenhagen: [www.cfb.dk](http://www.cfb.dk), online catalogue [www.dpb.dpu.dk](http://www.dpb.dpu.dk)

Children's Literature Unit at the University of Newcastle:  
[www.ncl.ac.uk/elll/childrensliterature/unit](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/elll/childrensliterature/unit)

The Finnish Institute for Children's Literature: [www.tampere.fi/kirjasto/sni](http://www.tampere.fi/kirjasto/sni)

Institut für Jugendbuchforschung, Frankfurt: [www.uni-frankfurt.de/fb/fb10/jubufu](http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/fb/fb10/jubufu)

The Norwegian Institute for Children's Books: <http://www.barnebokinstituttet.no/>

The Swedish Institute for Children's Books: [www.sbi.kb.se](http://www.sbi.kb.se)

information obtained through research and for expanding existing activities. One starting point is the establishment of institutions that support the integration of children's literature in a number of contexts.

Collaboration among the Nordic institutes is well established, so perhaps it is time to consider how international cooperation and networking between institutes on a worldwide scale could be established and reinforced. An international network of centres or institutes could lend help and support to countries that want to establish similar institutes and thereby to create a similar positive development within the field of children's literature in other countries.

The resourceful ladies of the New York Times Best Illustrated Book, **THE PROBLEM WITH CHICKENS** (Houghton Mifflin 2005) are featured again in this collaboration between award-winning photographer/author Bruce McMillan and gifted Icelandic artist, Gunnella. Bruce McMillan, with more than forty books to his credit, has set eight of these in Iceland. Having solved the problem with chickens, the Icelandic ladies set out to outwit the wind in a country so windy that walkers are at peril of toppling over. The ladies plant trees; the hens fertilise them. But the sheep continue to devour the new plants until the ladies find a way to keep them in check.

McMillan and Gunnella create a second original tale with wit and charm. Gunnella's chubby ladies, placid sheep and curious hens are vividly rendered in oils; her lively folk-art style perfectly complements McMillan's lighthearted telling of a quirky, humorous tale.

Glenna Sloan



**Bruce McMillan and Gunnella (illus)**

**How the Ladies Stopped the Wind**

New York: Houghton Mifflin/Lorraine Books 2007

32pp ISBN-10: 0618773304

ISBN-13: 9780618773305

(picturebook, 4–8)

# ALMA

A Swedish Award to  
World Children's Literature

• *In its short life, the ALMA award, established  
• in memory of the great Swedish author  
• Astrid Lindgren, has made a huge impact,  
• honouring authors, illustrators and a major  
• reading promotion. Maria Nikolajeva here  
• considers the criteria for the awards and the  
• questions the jury has to battle with. She  
• also overviews some of the winners' books*

For many years, people in Sweden and beyond were indignant that Astrid Lindgren, Sweden's foremost children's writer and one of the best national writers altogether, never received the Nobel Prize. After the distinguished writer's death in 2002, when the argument was no longer relevant, the Swedish government decided to establish an international children's literature award to commemorate Astrid Lindgren. The purpose of the award, with its monetary value of 5 million Swedish crowns (€450,000), almost equal to the Nobel Prize, was to raise the status of children's literature, to draw the attention of the world to literary excellence in children's books, and to promote reading. Children's authors, illustrators, storytellers and promoters of reading are eligible for the award. The bylaws of the award state: 'The body of work must uphold the highest artistic quality and evoke the deeply humanistic spirit that Astrid Lindgren treasured.'

The first award was to be given in 2003, and the jury of twelve had to work under considerable pressure, as it was first convened in December 2002 and the award was to be announced in the following March. Between them, the jury members had the qualifications to make a decision, and the first award winners became the Austrian writer Christine Nöstlinger and the American writer and illustrator Maurice Sendak.

The following year, however, when the jury started receiving nominations for the award rather than relying on its own knowledge, some insurmountable problems appeared. What exactly is 'highest artistic quality'? And what exactly does the 'deeply humanistic spirit' imply? On a more basic level, there is not even any common understanding

***'The body of work must uphold  
the highest artistic quality and evoke  
the deeply humanistic spirit that  
Astrid Lindgren treasured'***

by MARIA NIKOLAJEVA



Maria Nikolajeva is a professor of literature at Stockholm University and a member of the ALMA jury



*Astrid Lindgren reading to children*

about what children's literature is. How old is a child? Is literature for and about young adults included in the concept of children's literature? Can children's books portray adults as main characters – as do many contemporary Scandinavian picturebooks? Can children's books be as complex as the most sophisticated works for adults, or should one take audience appeal into consideration? Sweden and Scandinavia have a firm scholarly platform to deal with these issues, but are they always relevant and applicable?

In an international context, it is essential to avoid being ethnocentric. Obviously, what might be considered high literary quality in Scandinavia, with its long and strong tradition of children's literature, does not necessarily apply to countries and cultures where books for children have barely started to be written and published. Can we expect a solid body of printed work from someone whose origins lie in an exclusively oral culture? Obviously not, but oral storytelling can be just as splendid.

It will never be possible to take off the national eyeglasses and be totally objective in

judging the nominations arriving from all over the world. The first awards have set high standards, and the jury has never considered any politically correct choices. The notion that the award should consistently cover all continents is unacceptable (although in practice Europe, Asia, North and South America have already been represented). The distrusting argument that the winners would inevitably come from the English-speaking world has also proven wrong: German, Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese have so far been the native tongues of the winners. Previous recognition, such as the Andersen Medal, is not taken into account either. The award is given for a lifetime achievement, which more or less excludes new, beginning

writers and illustrators; likewise renowned mainstream writers who have published one or two children's books, no matter how good. For reading promotion, the eligible organisation or project must be well established and have produced considerable impact, nationally and preferably also internationally. How can all these issues

***It will never be possible  
to take off the national  
eyeglasses and be  
totally objective*** ●●●●●●●●●●

be combined with the jury's striving to be innovative and unconventional, to celebrate originality and uniqueness rather than a long list of publications and a privileged status in the home country? All these are just a tiny sample of the questions that the jury has been struggling with.

What are the common denominators of the seven award-winners: Christine Nöstlinger, Maurice Sendak, Lygia Bojunga, Ryôji Arai, Philip Pullman, Katherine Paterson and the reading-promotion institution Banco del Libro in Venezuela? The winners are obviously widely diverse, they work in different genres and in different media; they address different categories of readers. In their works, readers are transported to faraway countries and long-ago histories, to imaginary lands and mysterious mindscapes, to moments of pain and joy. And Banco del Libro's activities literally include journeys to impenetrable woods and mountains.

The first unquestionable feature is respect for the child. No books that speak down to children or confirm adults' absolute power will ever receive the ALMA award. In the figure of Pippi Longstocking, Astrid Lindgren has interrogated the rules and laws imposed on children by the adult world. Maurice

Sendak, the 2003 winner, shows in his world-famous picturebook *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) how the mother has the power to deny her child food, and while she changes her mind towards the end of the story, she still seems to deny him warmth and love. Yet what Sendak's book demonstrates is the omnipotent power of imagination that makes the child invincible in any situation. In the other 2003 winner, Christine Nöstlinger's *Wir pfeifen auf den Gurkenkönig* (*The Cucumber King*) (1972), the father of the protagonist forms an alliance with a tyrant, but both are overthrown by the joint efforts of children's inherent sense of justice. The issue of power balance is thus essential for a genuinely talented children's writer. This includes, of course, also questions of gender, race, religious and political beliefs that frequently, and often covertly, amplify the child/adult confrontation.

No authors using a condescending didactic voice towards their young readers will ever be considered, and no authors who use literature exclusively for educational purposes and to preach morals, no matter how urgent these may be. Banco del Libro, the 2007 winner, successfully combines educational goals with the high artistic level of the books chosen for their activities. The jury considered that Christine Nöstlinger has 'a reliably bad child-rearing influence'. Like Pippi, her characters do not comply with normal behaviour, but this is exactly the lesson which the author proposes, truly in the spirit of Astrid Lindgren. The title character of *Konrad oder Das Kind aus der Konservenbüchse*

• ***How can all these issues be combined with the jury's striving to be innovative and unconventional?***

• ***No books that speak down to children or confirm adults' absolute power will ever receive the ALMA award***

***The winning author's books  
should not be dark and  
completely pessimistic, and  
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ultimately defeated*** :

(*Conrad: The Factory-made Boy*) (1975) arrives to his foster mother as perfect as a child could be, fully socialised, obedient and polite, but devoid of any genuine trait of childness. The hilarious story shows his development into a child full of joy, mischief and creativity. In the process, he also changes the adults around him – as does Pippi.

The second decisive aspect is the faith in the child. The winning author's books should not be dark and completely pessimistic, and the child cannot be ultimately defeated. This does not mean that books must necessarily have happy endings and offer easy solutions. Astrid Lindgren's own books, *Mio, min Mio* (*Mio, My Son*) (1954) and *Bröderna Lejonhjärta* (*The Brothers Lionheart*) (1973), touch upon disturbing issues, but they do not take away hope. Katherine Paterson, the 2006 winner, has been repeatedly accused by critics of abandoning her readers without hope when the book is finished. Paterson has refuted this by remarking that hope cannot be simply pasted on at the end of a book. Instead, her books show the natural resilience of the child who can go further even after most serious traumas. Jess in *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), Gilly in *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (1978), Park in *Park's Quest* (1988), Vinnie in *Flip-Flop Girl* (1994), Angel in *The Same Stuff as Stars* (2002) have all been through experiences that children preferably should be spared. Yet they are portrayed in a manner that inspires young readers rather than makes them frustrated. This is the sign of a true artist.

***No evil children can appear  
in an ALMA award book*** :

No evil children can appear in an ALMA award book. Philip Pullman, the 2005 winner, portrays an ambivalent figure in the 'His Dark Materials' trilogy (1996–2000), a girl whose moral qualities are not always crystal clear, whose loyalties are dubious, who causes the death of her best friend; yet ultimately she stands for the good, the just and the poetic. Once again the supreme power of childhood is maintained, but unlike many children's writers, Pullman does not propagate the idea of eternal childhood, of the idyllic refuge for a child who does not want to grow up. Growing up is an inseparable part of life, as Astrid Lindgren also claims, and in Pullman's novels the characters go through this painful process in a variety of situations: in fantasy, such as 'His Dark Materials', and in the contemporary realistic novel (*The Broken Bridge* 1990; *The Butterfly Tattoo* 1992), in historical settings ('Sally Lockhart' quartet, 1985–1994,

***The supreme power of  
childhood is maintained*** :

starting with *The Ruby in the Smoke*) and Oriental settings (*The Firework-Maker's Daughter*, 1995), in medieval horror stories (*Count Karlstein* 1982) and parodical fairy tales (*I Was a Rat!* 1999). The variety of genres is striking, as is also true of Christine Nöstlinger, who ventures into really difficult subjects such as a child's experience of war in *Maikäfer, flieg!* [*Fly Away Home*] (1973) and *Zwei Wochen im Mai* [Two weeks in May] (1981). Katherine Paterson lets her characters pass from childhood into adulthood in ancient China and Japan, as well as in 19th-century USA. Yet whatever the setting, the focus is always on the child, and the view on childhood reflected in the books is the view of a conscious contemporary writer.

The third aspect worth touching upon is a profound understanding of the child. Astrid Lindgren used to be asked how she managed to understand the innermost thoughts and feelings

of a child. Usually she answered that she remembered well what it was like to be a child; that she wrote from the memories of her own childhood. It may be so, but for the ALMA winners, to understand a child is a very special talent going far beyond childhood memories. It is the talent of empathy, of shedding off the adult worldview and adopting, for the duration of the book, the perspective of a young person. The art is, however, not to lose the adult storytelling skills, not to descend to the child's presumed cognitive level, to avoid primitive language, but acknowledge children's ability to feel and see, even though they cannot express themselves in words in a manner many adults self-righteously judge as adequate.

A deep penetration of a child's psyche is the foremost characteristic of Lygia Bojunga, the 2004 winner, who manages to use simple and accessible language to convey complex mental states, unspeakable truths, most secret emotions. Each book is a study of human fate drawn with precision and tremendous empathy. Each book is a sophisticated portrait of a child working through loss, pain and sorrow: Rachel in *A bolsa amarela* [The yellow bag] (1976), Alexander in *A casa da madrinha* [The godmother's house] (1978), Maria in *Corda bamba* [Free rope] (1979), or Claudio in *O meu amigo pintor* (*My Friend the Painter*) (1987), or Lucas in *Seis vezes Lucas* [Six times Lucas] (1995). Even an armadillo in *O sofá estampado* [The flowery sofa] (1980) has a complex inner life, representing a young child. A natural part of the Latin American magical realism, Bojunga blends the everyday and the imaginary, the ordinary and the extraordinary, yet ever going beyond a child's frame of reference. Like Paterson and Pullman, she makes the reader think, reflect, become an active agent in interaction with the text.

Bojunga's characters cannot leave any reader indifferent, yet they are no easy reads. Simplicity, adaptation to the average level does not rate high in the ALMA jury's deliberations. Maurice Sendak's seemingly short and undemanding stories are in fact extremely complex in their rich visual imagery with a perfect balance between words and pictures. In *Where the Wild Things Are*, *In The Night Kitchen* (1970) and *Outside Over There* (1981) he resorts to images when words become insufficient to convey a child's fears and anxieties, anger and longing. Sendak's twofold word/image narratives affect the readers/viewers in an immediate and effective way. Similarly, he converts unpretentious nursery rhymes into a passionate accusation of social injustice and human sufferings in *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* (1983), and mocks dictatorship and tyranny in *Brundibar* (2003), without losing touch with the child's point of view.

• ***It is the talent of empathy,  
of shedding off the adult  
worldview***

• ***Simplicity, adaptation to  
the average level does not  
rate high in the ALMA  
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### Children's books discussed

- Lygia Bojunga *A bolsa amarela* (1976) [The yellow bag]  
 Lygia Bojunga *A casa da madrinha* (1978) [The godmother's house]  
 Lygia Bojunga *Corda bamba* (1979) [Free rope]  
 Lygia Bojunga *O meu amigo pintor* (1987); available in English as *My Friend the Painter* from Harcourt  
 Lygia Bojunga *Seis vezes Lucas* (1995) [Six times Lucas]  
 Lygia Bojunga *O sofá estampado* (1980) [The flowery sofa]  
 Astrid Lindgren *Mio, min Mio* (1954); available in English as *Mio, My Son* from Purple House Press  
 Astrid Lindgren *Bröderna Lejonhjärta* (1973); available in English as *The Brothers Lionheart* from Purple House Press  
 Christine Nöstlinger *Wir pfeifen auf den Gurkenkönig* (1972) Beltz & Gelberg; available in English as *The Cucumber King* from Dutton  
 Christine Nöstlinger *Konrad oder Das Kind aus der Konservenbüchse* (1975) Oetinger; available in English as *Conrad: The Factory-made Boy* from Andersen  
 Christine Nöstlinger *Maikäfer, flieg!* (1973) Beltz & Gelberg; available in English as *Fly Away Home* from F Watts  
 Christine Nöstlinger *Zwei Wochen im Mai* (1981) [Two weeks in May]  
 Christine Nöstlinger 'Franz' series (1984–)  
 Katherine Paterson *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977)  
 Katherine Paterson *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (1978)  
 Katherine Paterson *Park's Quest* (1988)  
 Katherine Paterson *Flip-Flop Girl* (1994)  
 Katherine Paterson *The Same Stuff as Stars* (2002)  
 Philip Pullman 'His Dark Materials' (1996–2000)  
 Philip Pullman *The Broken Bridge* (1990)  
 Philip Pullman *The Butterfly Tattoo* (1992)  
 Philip Pullman The 'Sally Lockhart' quartet (1985–1994)  
 Philip Pullman *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* (1995)  
 Philip Pullman *Count Karlstein* (1982)  
 Philip Pullman *I Was a Rat!* (1999)  
 Philip Pullman *The Scarecrow and His Servant* (2004)  
 Maurice Sendak *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963)  
 Maurice Sendak *In the Night Kitchen* (1970)  
 Maurice Sendak *Outside Over There* (1981)  
 Maurice Sendak *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* (1983)  
 Maurice Sendak *Brundibar* (2003)

Humour is an inherent part of a truly gifted children's writer. The 2005 winner Ryôji Arai's books are festivals of joy and playfulness, warm and pleasurable, full of verbal and visual games. Yet behind the humour deep philosophical truths are hidden. Christine Nöstlinger's series about Franz (1984–) adhere to the tradition of naughty-boy children's literature, while in Pullman's *The Scarecrow and His Servant* (2004) one of the well-known figures of children's literature, a living scarecrow, takes on a new twist.

Yet no genuine children's book is for a child alone. The ALMA winners' books bridge the gap between young and adult readers, offering the latter something to think about, something to share with the children. However, they never evoke sentimentality and nostalgia in adults, and they never talk to adults over a child's head. Instead they bring children and adults together in a joint reading experience.

Last but not least is the high artistic quality of the winners. All the authors demonstrate a variety of styles, a mastery of plot and characterisation; they are all skilful storytellers who use the richness of language and artistic devices, of folklore traditions and literary reminiscences, without bothering whether

***Humour is an inherent  
part of a truly gifted  
children's writer***

their readers are mature enough to understand. Reading is universally acknowledged as the best way to widen a child's horizons, and in order to achieve this goal, books must be challenging, in form as well as in content.

It may seem impossible to consider the artistic quality of a reading-promotion organisation, but even a brief look at the description of Banco del Libro's activities reveals incredible artistic imagination: book boats and book mules, storytelling in remote villages, inspirational enthusiasm and love of their work is certainly not worth less than an author's or illustrator's skills.

Some of the award-winners did not enjoy international fame at the time when they received the award, such as Christine Nöstlinger and Lygia Bojunga, even though some of their works were translated into major languages. Ryōji Arai was most probably a completely new name for many readers and critics. Hopefully, the award has made them better known throughout the world. In fact, several countries have brought out new translations and reissued books that had been out of print. This certainly contributes to the main goal of the award: to make outstanding children's literature available to all children in the world.

Astrid Lindgren was one of the best children's writers of all times. By giving the award, the jury wishes to set the standards of international children's literature to match her genius.

*More information about the award and the winners is to be found on the ALMA website, [www.alma.se](http://www.alma.se)*

From the day Roland arrives in Benjamin Dove's small Icelandic town, it is clear that he is a strange and special boy. Roland fearlessly stands up to Howard, the local bully, setting in motion a series of unexpected events. Benjamin and his friends join Roland in forming an order of knights, performing good deeds that inspire those around them to great acts of kindness. But like the knights of old, they face dangers from both outside and inside their fellowship. Violent consequences result when one of their own breaks away from their knighthood.

Erlings' radiant narrative perfectly illuminates the intensity of adolescent emotions, how rapidly friendships bond and crumble, how easily small hurts escalate into large betrayals. Here the small learn how to be strong, that friends can become enemies, and that even bullies can be heroes. *BENJAMIN DOVE* is a novel of chivalric heroism, profound sacrifice, and the redeeming power of love.

Tanja Nathanael



Fridrik Erlingsson (Fridrik Erlings)

BENJAMÍN DÚFA / BENJAMIN DOVE

Reykjavik: Vaka-Helgafell 1992

First US edition: NY: North-South Books 2007

206pp ISBN-10: 0735821496

ISBN-13: 9780735821491

(fantasy, 9+)

## Submission Guidelines for *Bookbird*

*Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* is the refereed journal of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY).

Papers on any topic related to children's literature and of interest to an international audience will be considered for publication. Contributions are invited not only from scholars and critics but also from editors, translators, publishers, librarians, classroom educators and children's book authors and illustrators or anyone working in the field of children's literature. Please try to supply illustrations for your article. (Book covers are sufficient, but other illustrations are also welcome.)

**Length:** Up to 3000 words

**Language:** Articles are published in English, but where authors have no translation facilities, we can accept

contributions in most major European languages. Please contact us first if you have a translation problem.

**Format:** Word for Windows (Mac users please save your document in rich text format – RTF) as an email attachment; send illustrations as JPG attachments.

**Style and layout:** The author's name and details should appear in the email only, not in the paper itself. A stylesheet is available with more detailed guidelines.

**Deadline:** *Bookbird* is published every quarter, in January, April, July, October. Papers may be submitted at any time, but it is unlikely that your paper, if accepted for publication, would be published for at least six to nine months from the date of submission, to allow time for refereeing and the production process.

**Contact details:** Please send two copies: one to [bookbirdsp@oldtown.ie](mailto:bookbirdsp@oldtown.ie) AND one to [bookbirdvc@oldtown.ie](mailto:bookbirdvc@oldtown.ie)

**NB:** Please put **Bookbird submission** followed by your initials in the subject line.

*Please remember to include your full name and contact details (including postal address), together with your professional affiliation and/or a few lines describing your area of work in the body of your email.*

### Send us a book postcard from your part of the world!

*Notices on international children's books, distributed throughout Bookbird, are compiled from sources around the world by Glenna Sloan, who teaches children's literature at Queens College, City University of New York.*



Have you got a favourite recently published children's book – a picturebook, story collection, novel or information book – that you think should be known outside its own country? If you know of a book from your own or another country that you feel should be introduced to the IBBY community, please send a short account of it to us at *Bookbird*, and we may publish it.

Send copy (about 150 words), together with full publication details (use 'postcard' reviews in this issue of *Bookbird* as a model) and a scan of the cover image (in JPG format), to Professor Glenna Sloan ([glennasloan@hotmail.com](mailto:glennasloan@hotmail.com)).

We are very happy to receive reviews from non-English-speaking countries – but remember to include an English translation of the title as well as the original title (in transliterated form, where applicable).

# Books on Books



• In keeping with the Scandinavian theme of this issue, to celebrate the 2008 IBBY congress in Copenhagen, all the books reviewed here are from Scandinavia: a pictorial biography of Astrid Lindgren; a scholarly edition of Pippi Longstocking; together with three other books from scholarly series. These scholarly series – which reflect the preoccupations of Scandinavian scholarship and also include contributions from non-Scandinavian countries – complement the wide-ranging overviews provided by journals and periodicals and allow us to trace overarching trends in children’s book research in the Nordic countries over the years

edited and compiled by

CHRISTIANE RAABE

(translations by Nikola von Merveldt)



Christiane Raabe is director of the Internationale Jugendbibliothek (International Youth Library) in Munich

## DENMARK

ANETTE ØSTER (ED)

***Nedslag i børnelitteraturforskningen 8***

[Research into children's literature 8]

(Series: Skrifter fra Center for børnelitteratur)

Frederiksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag 2007 202pp

ISBN 9788778673596 DKK 228



Since the year 2000, the Danish Center for børnelitteratur (Centre for Children's Literature) has been publishing the yearbook *Nedslag i børnelitteraturforskningen* [Research into children's literature]. It is edited by one of the centre's research group

and part of the series 'Skrifter fra Center for børnelitteratur', which also includes monographs.

The annually published book brings together shorter contributions with detailed abstracts in English. More general information about Danish children's and young adult literature such as one would expect to find in a yearbook – statistics, conference reports, calls for papers and announcements of literary awards – is lacking, however.

Issue number 8 published in 2007 reflects the yearbook's international orientation. It includes articles by foreign scholars as well as topics that transcend national boundaries. Hans-Heino Ewers from the Institut für Jugendbuchforschung (Frankfurt Institute for Children's Literature Research) contributes a piece on canon-building in children's literature. The Norwegian scholar Nina Goga looks at biographies for children by analysing biographies of Adolf Hitler. Other contributions address issues such as the promotion of reading and the teaching of literature and explore historical children's literature.

*Andreas Bode*

## FINLAND

KAISU RÄTTYÄ

***Rajoja kohdaten. Teemojen ja kerronnan suhde Hannele Huovin nuortenromaaneissa 1980- ja 1990-luvulla***

[Transcending the boundaries. The relation between themes and narration in Hannele Huovi's young adult novels, 1980-1990]

(Series: Suomen Nuorisokirjallisuuden Instituutin julkaisuja 29)

Tampere: Suomen Nuorisokirjallisuuden Instituutin 2007

308pp ISBN 9789529577132 €29



The series published by the Finnish Institute for Children's Literature was launched in 1981 with Ulla Lehtonen's seminal study *Lastenkirjallisuus Suomessa, 1543-1850* [History of Finnish children's literature, 1543-1850]. Now encompassing

a number of important monographs, it has accomplished for Finnish children's literature scholarship what 'Skrifter utgivna av Svenska barnboksinstitutet' have achieved in Sweden. It focuses on historical research but also includes works on classic Finnish children's authors such as Tove Jansson, reference bibliographies and studies on the art of illustration.

In the most recent volume, Kaisu Rättyä, current director of the Finnish Institute for Children's Literature, presents the novels published by the internationally renowned author Hannele Huovi between 1980 and 1990. Rättyä assesses Huovi's contribution to Finnish young adult novels by analysing to what extent the author explores new themes and narrative techniques. With this study, she traces the major developments in young adult fiction in the second half of the 20th century.

*Andreas Bode*

## NORWAY

PER OLAV KALDESTAD AND KARIN  
BEATEVOLD (EDS)

**Årboka. Litteratur for barn og unge 2007**  
[Yearbook. Children's and young adult literature  
2007]

Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget 2007

ISBN 9788252169843 NOK 299

Karin Beate Vold, director of the Norsk barnebokinstitutt (Norwegian Institute for Children's Books), and Per Olav Kaldestad, children's author and professor of Norwegian, are the chief editors of this yearbook, whose first issue was published in 1998. They conceived and created it as a forum for critical debate and scholarship and as a platform for the promotion of children's literature.

Despite their focus on Norwegian children's literature, the yearbooks, like other ventures of their kind, are open to all of Scandinavian children's literature. Alongside articles analysing trends, themes and authors, they provide information on the statistics of Norwegian children's literature (for 2004 and 2005), name the winners of the different national and local literary awards and list recent scholarly publications in an annex. The slender volumes are thus rich in content.

The 2007 yearbook offers readers an overview of the broad range of questions addressed by Norwegian children's literature scholarship. Åse Marie Ommundsen traces the trends of Per Olav Kaldestad's postmodern young adult literature from the Nordic countries. This article is followed by contributions on non-fiction books (Nina Goga), literature in schools (Sylvi Penne),

digital literature for children and teenagers (Silje Hernæs Linhart), the issue of gender in the Swedish book for toddlers *Apan fin* [Fine monkey] (Ingeborg Mjør), and the history of Norwegian children's books. This last essay draws surprising parallels between a picturebook by Tove Jansson published in 1960, and thus almost qualifying as a historical work, and a book by Fam Ekman.

An interview with Guri Vesaas gives an insight into a period of Norwegian publishing history. For forty years, Vesaas directed the children's division of Det Norske Samlaget, a publishing house publishing books in Nynorsk. Einar Økland, who was one of her most important authors, has contributed a piece on historical Norwegian children's books. Other authors, including Bjørn Ingvaldsen and Finn Øglænd, also have their say.

***The yearbook offers readers  
an overview of the broad  
range of questions addressed  
by Norwegian children's  
literature scholarship***



Under the heading 'Nordisk vindauge', the 2007 issue introduces a new column offering a survey of children's literature published in the other Scandinavian countries. Finally, one article reviews the reception of Norwegian children's literature outside Norway.

All this precious information, however, is only available to readers with knowledge of the Norwegian language; English abstracts would have allowed a wider audience to learn more about the state of Norwegian children's literature.

*Andreas Bode*

## SWEDEN

JACOB FORSELL (ED)  
 JOHAN ERSÉUS AND MARGARETA  
 STRÖMSTEDT

***Astrids bilder*** [Astrid's pictures]

Stockholm: Max Ström 2006 271pp  
 ISBN 9789171260314 SEK 300 (approx)

Astrid Lindgren would have celebrated her 100th birthday on 14 November 2007. To mark this occasion, several new titles about the life and work of the great Swedish children's author were published, including this one.

*Pippi Långstrump* (*Pippi Longstocking*) thrust Lindgren into the limelight, but the internationally renowned writer always took care to protect her privacy. Born the second child of Samuel August Erikson and his wife Hanna, Lindgren spent a care-free childhood on their farm in Näs, thriving on freedom and a deep sense of security. At the age of 18, she became pregnant and moved to Stockholm as a single parent, where she eked out a living. She eventually married and had a second child.

It was at this child's sickbed that Lindgren started telling the story of an unconventional girl named Pippi Långstrump. This was the beginning of a career that was to make her one of the most famous and widely read Swedish children's writers.

Her husband Sture died prematurely in 1952. Lindgren never remarried, and she spent the rest of her life in a modest Stockholm apartment or at her cottage on the island of Furusund. Time and time again, she surprised her readers with new and very different books; she was involved in the film adaptations of her books, and later used her moral authority to take a public stance on social issues. But throughout her life, Lindgren shied away from public attention and preferred to spend time with family and a few select friends.

These facts are not new. But who was the real Astrid Lindgren? How did she live and work? Did

she always remain, as some like to claim, the little peasant girl from Vimmerby? In *Astrids bilder*, the photographer Jacob Forsell, the author Johan Erséus, and Lindgren's long-term friend, the journalist Margareta Strömstedt, attempt to take a closer look at the life of the popular author.

Forsell, who has taken many iconic pictures of Lindgren, spent years going through the vast archives to select photos and documents that would shed new light on the author's biography. The generously illustrated chapters vividly show different aspects of Lindgren's life, such as her marriage, children, friends, homes, films, social engagement and later years. The pictures trace Lindgren's steps from childhood to old age; they show her in turn flirtatious and glamorous, as a family person and children's friend, in tune with nature or putting on a public persona. The photographs taken during her last years are perhaps the most powerful. Exploring changing perspectives, they captivate the viewer and reveal unexpected aspects of the lesser-known Lindgren.

***A biography in pictures,  
 which gives us an intimate  
 close-up view of Lindgren  
 while never exposing her*** :

The book is a true companion, which tells readers much more about her person than Lindgren herself ever disclosed in her interviews or autobiographical texts. The result is a biography in pictures, which gives us an intimate close-up view of Lindgren while never exposing her.

*Christiane Raabe*

## SWEDEN

ASTRID LINDGREN

ULLA LUNDQVIST AND KARIN NYMAN (EDS)

***Ur-Pippi***

[The proto-Pippi]

(Series: Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Barnboksinstitutet 94)

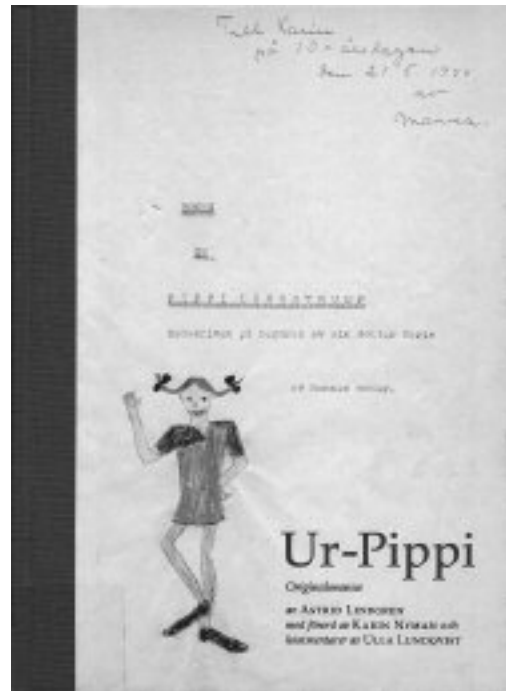
Stockholm: Råben &amp; Sjögren 2007 156pp

ISBN 9789129666625 SEK 200 (approx)

'Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Barnboksinstitutet' [Publications of the Swedish Institute for Children's Books] is the oldest Swedish series dedicated to the study of children's literature. Since 1971, it has been featuring monographs and PhD dissertations by some of the leading scholars in the field. The series covers a lot of ground. It concentrates on Swedish children's literature from the early beginnings to the present day with a special emphasis on the work of Astrid Lindgren, but it also includes several volumes on literature from other national traditions. Göte Klingberg, the doyen of Swedish children's book research, for example, authored two books in the series on one of his favourite topics, namely British children's books and picturebooks. The series also explores many other themes and topics, including one volume on young adult literature in the German Democratic Republic, several titles on Hans Christian Andersen, Heinrich Hoffmann and Ernst Kreidolf, and even a study on the Tarzan novels.

This 94th volume, an annotated edition of the prototype of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Långstrump*, brings the series particular acclaim, uncovering as it does interesting primary material and advancing original scholarship. This *Ur-Pippi* was first published in 2007 on the centenary of Lindgren's birthday with an extensive and illuminating commentary by Ulla Lundqvist. To the delight of many Lindgren fans, the 'original manuscript' of Pippi is now available; to their regret, it is not a facsimile but merely a reprint edition. Only the endpapers grant a glimpse of the pages as originally typed.

*Andreas Bode*



# Focus IBBY



- *Announcing the winners of the IBBY Asahi*
- *Reading Promotion Award 2008; more about*
- *the Copenhagen congress; an IBBY Children*
- *in Crisis project for children traumatised by*
- *war in Lebanon; and José Miguel de Azaola*
- *1917–2007 (obit)*

## IBBY–Asahi Reading Promotion Award 2008

The jury for the IBBY-Asahi Award 2008 comprised Elda Nogueira (Brazil) as chair, Hannelore Daubert (Germany), Reina Duarte (Spain), Ann Lazim (UK), Ahmad Redza (Malaysia) and Ira Saxena (India).

And the winners are:

**The Reading Promotion Project of Action with Lao Children**

and

**Editions Bakame – Books for Children in Rwanda**

IBBY warmly congratulates these two outstanding projects for their creative and effective approaches to helping children enter the world of books and reading.

compiled and edited by

ELIZABETH PAGE



*Elizabeth Page is IBBY's  
member services, communications  
and new projects director*

## ***The Reading Promotion Project of Action with Lao Children***

The Lao civil war and revolution in the late 1970s forced a large number of refugees to flee the Indochinese Peninsula. Ms Chanthasone Inthavong, from Lao, but then living in Japan, believed that just accepting the refugees did not solve the basic problems. Thus, in 1982, she established the Association for Sending Picture Books to Lao Children. At first the organisation sent Japanese children's books, picturebooks and stationery to Lao children. Later in 1990 the association started sending goods to support the publishing of Lao books by Lao authors and artists. The activities that had started in Japan spread further in Lao. Now, 25 years later the association has become a non-governmental organisation with the title Action with Lao Children, which promotes literacy education and promotes the rights of children in Lao. Since then, around 620,000 copies of books for children have been published in the Lao language. The project has united the National Library of Lao and the Ministry of Education, which supports the National Reading Promotion Project: one of their national priorities. To accomplish the goals and objectives of the project, many reading activities have been developed.



*Above: Lao children receiving their books*

*Left: Rwandan children receiving their books*

## ***Editions Bakame – Books for Children in Rwanda***

Following the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Agnes Gyr-Ukunda established Editions Bakame in 1995 as an independent, non-profit publishing house for children and young people. Its aim is to give children books in Kinyarwanda, the national language understood by all Rwandans, in order to help them overcome the horrors of the genocide by means of healthy reading based on their culture. It is the first Rwandan publisher to offer children's and youth literature in Kinyarwanda. Bakame publishes stories, documentaries, novels for young adults, as well as picturebooks. At the same time it works towards the revival of traditional oral literature and putting it in written form; the promotion of a reading culture in Rwanda; the training of authors and illustrators in workshops and giving them the opportunity to be published. Since 1995, Bakame has published thirty titles with a total print run exceeding 450,000 copies.

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published thirty titles with  
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450,000 copies***

## IBBY Congress 2008: Stories in History – History in Stories



Denmark is a country of storytellers, the most famous of all being Hans Christian Andersen: the man who has fascinated the world for nearly 200 years with his tales of bravery and stupidity, beauty and ugliness, greed and generosity – stories that tell us about ourselves.

The 31st IBBY congress will be held in the capital city of this land of stories in September 2008. The programme is now finalised and promises to be a fascinating mixture of stories from other lands, stories from history and the future, stories for times of crisis, stories of war and how to get the balance right between cultural sensitivity and freedom of speech in our stories. The 97 seminar speakers will cover a multitude of related topics. With speakers from Uganda to Russia to Brazil to Nepal to Canada and New Zealand, as well as all stations in between, we are going to have a truly international congress.

***The programme promises  
to be a fascinating  
mixture of stories*** :

The opening ceremony will take place in the world-famous Glassalen in the Tivoli Gardens. The programme includes songs by Hans Christian Andersen sung by the children's choir of Radio Denmark, short ballet sequences based on an Andersen story and the presentation of the 2008 Hans Christian Andersen medals and diplomas. The patron of the awards, HRH Queen Margrethe of Denmark, is expected to be present for the ceremony.

The winners of the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Awards 2008 will be guests of honour at the presentation of the awards on Tuesday, 9 September at a festive evening hosted by the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen at the Town Hall in the centre of the city.

The closing ceremony will take place in the Copenhagen former circus. This interesting old building has been turned into a nightclub venue that is used for many special events, but maybe this will be the first children's literature event to take place there! The old circus atmosphere is ever present and the high rounded ceiling is reminiscent of a circus tent.

The 31st IBBY congress is also the venue for IBBY's own special activities: the 2008 Honour List presentation, the IBBY Open Forum, the General Assembly and the Executive Committee meetings. This year, thanks to support by the Katherine Paterson Family Foundation, IBBY is able to hold a pre-congress workshop for its national sections. The aim is to strengthen our national sections from within and support their work in reading promotion, thus encouraging a reading society and ultimately the quality of life. Speakers will talk about fundraising, networking, encouraging relationships within a country and bibliotherapy. We hope that one member of every section will be able to attend this special workshop.

For full information, please visit the congress website [www.ibby2008.dk](http://www.ibby2008.dk)

## Conflict Management in Lebanon

The IBBY Children in Crisis project on Conflict Management for the Traumatised Children of War in Lebanon has been an interesting project indeed. Implementing it was a challenging task where many difficulties were encountered due to the lack of security in the areas where we were working, but the results achieved are rewarding. Because of the mass destruction left by the recent war, the project took longer than expected to get off the ground. However, once it began, 32 teachers from sixteen schools received their training.



*Teacher-training session in Lebanon*

In November of the school year 2007-2008, Lebanese IBBY (LBBY), in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, re-established contacts with the schools after the long summer break. The political situation was less turbulent than in the previous year, which meant that the contacts were smoother and 22 new teachers and two social workers from eighteen schools and two social centres were recruited for training. Training took place at the beginning of December in the Hadath Social Center, which belongs to the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The sessions went well and the teachers and social workers received the project manuals along with the specially printed workbooks for the children: a total of 1800 books were distributed. They were also given lists of storybooks that were recommended to supplement the project. A puppet show was presented to 800 children who came from the schools that are implementing the programme. Each child was given a book and the eighteen schools within the programme were also each given fifty storybooks and science books for their libraries.

The teachers who took part in the training were excited about the project and they all promised to implement it in their respective schools. This was the condition to accept them for training. Some school principals asked if we could train more of their teachers in the skills we were teaching and we promised to try to find the means to continue.

To work in the public school, permission has to be granted by the Ministry of Education and this long process has taken a year to complete. After this success,

• ***Implementing [the project]***  
 • ***was a challenging task ...***  
 • ***due to the lack of security***  
 • ***in the areas where we were***  
 • ***working***

we went a step further by asking the Unit of Guidance and Counselling in the Ministry of Education about training their educational counsellors. These counsellors have access to all the elementary schools across the country, and we felt that to train them in the skills we were presenting to teachers in selected schools would be very beneficial and allow them to continue training the teachers. It took more months to convince all those concerned and get all the necessary permits for the task and finally we were given approval to proceed.

At the beginning of 2008, a two-day training workshop took place at the Ministry of Education. The whole team of 33 educational advisers across the country took part in the workshop. They were given the same materials that we had presented to the teachers and, in addition, the names of the publishing houses where these books could be found. Each counsellor also received a set of 25 teachers' manuals and 100 workbooks. They were very receptive and happy to get these materials. In particular, the recommended lists of storybooks were very welcome and will be used in different activities and shared with the school librarians.

The teachers' reports are very encouraging. Already they can see an improvement in the children's behaviour and naturally this gives them personal satisfaction. They feel that through their help the children are changing their unacceptable ways of solving problems and replacing it with more socially accepted behaviour. They realise that they are protecting these children from delinquency and other major problems in the future.

A project of this nature on a national basis needs a larger budget than the one we began with, but now with the government's involvement and concern, it will be able to be implemented on a large scale.

We planted the seeds and it is up to the authorities to nourish it and see it grow!

*Julinda Abu Nasr*

## José Miguel de Azaola 1917–2007

My father, a Spanish Basque, born in 1917, spent most of his life surrounded by children and, simultaneously, by books. Books in their thousands and quite a lot of children (we were 14 siblings) whose natural environment was inevitably – well, books and more books. He had written and published his first one when he was just 13 (a history of Bilbao, his town of birth) and had never stopped writing since. I must admit that his offspring have written infinitely less than he did, but thanks to him, we never stopped reading and feeding our own children with more reading.

Given the size of the family, my father needed to complement his salary as director of the National Institute for the Spanish Book (INLE) with other sources of income, something which fortunately was helped by his very wide and knowledgeable range of interests as well as by his vocational capacities as a writer, a journalist and a lecturer. For him, to have a big study in the house seemed an absolute necessity – but from the very beginning, he used it, almost invariably, as a storage room where he kept all the favourite books of his personal library as well as huge heaps of newspaper clippings, leaflets, letters and all kinds of drafts, which piled up on the floor and over his desk. Working in that room was physically impossible. To my mother's despair, even dusting it wasn't a realistic possibility. As a consequence, almost every evening, when my father came back from the office, he covered the dining table with a pile of papers and reference books and started tapping, imperturbably, his next lecture or newspaper article on his rickety old typewriter. Of course, the dining room was within range, not just of the noise but often of the very live action of the innumerable children's games, chases and fights which took place in the house. But such a pandemonium was obviously, if not decidedly inspiring, at least a

stimulating working atmosphere for my father's creativity. In a funny way, children and books seemed to be inseparable for him.

One day he told us that he was organising, through the INLE, a national literary prize for children's books. I remember myself and several of my brothers and sisters reading some of the books sent by the publishers and commenting on them with my father. The prize was called Lazarillo and it soon became the most prestigious Spanish award for children's fiction. It also meant a fine growth of the kids' bookshelves in the household, of course.



A few years later, in the late 1950s, my father's own shelves suddenly started being populated by wave after wave of children's books in foreign languages. My father spoke many of them, OK. But still, why children's books? I subsequently learned that he belonged to a group of friends who met somewhere in Switzerland from time to time, and then in other parts of the wide world, to award the most important prize for writers of children's books in the whole world. That group was called IBBY and the prize was the Hans Christian Andersen Medal. My father was a member of the jury and he became its president in 1960.

These were the years of my late adolescence, when I used to spend my summer holidays in Germany, learning the language, and usually paying my way by taking a job. My father was a good friend of Walter

**• Children and books seemed  
• to be inseparable for him**

Scherf, the director of the Internationale Jugendbibliothek (IJB) in Munich. That providential friendship and Walter Scherf's generosity gave me the opportunity to spend an unforgettable three-month spell as a trainee in that unique library in 1962. At the IJB, still at that time in the relatively modest Kaulbachstrasse building, I learnt who Jella Lepman was and I understood better what my father did as well as what IBBY was all about.

One day in December the following year, the family moved to Paris. My father had been employed by UNESCO. I went to France to help with the removal and the setting up of the new household, but in August 1964 I returned to Madrid in order to follow my university studies and begin an independent grown-up life. Inevitably, I ended up being employed by a publishing house and, step-by-step, became myself a publisher by trade. As it happens, my first employer published, among other things, also children's books (how could it be otherwise?) and my interest and work became focused on them from the very beginning.

In the autumn of 1964, IBBY held a congress in Madrid. I attended some of the sessions with my new bosses and several colleagues, and there I saw

my father, awarding the Andersen Medal to René Guillot and delivering a beautiful *laudation*. That same afternoon, in the coffee break, he introduced me to a venerable old lady called Jella Lepman, the one I had heard so much about in Munich two years before.

In 1970, I was at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair, as every year, manning my company’s stand and discussing editorial projects, and I bumped into IBBY once again, quite unexpectedly this time, as the congress which should have taken place in Prague had to be moved hurriedly to Bologna. There was my father too, awarding the Andersen Medals (two by then) to Gianni Rodari and Maurice Sendak. That was his last performance as an active member of the organisation and president of the Andersen jury, which he had chaired for ten years running.

On that day I couldn’t guess for a second that, eight years later, in Würzburg, I would become an elected Executive Committee member of the international body which my father’s ‘group of friends’ actually constituted. For all the respect I had for it, IBBY, which one day would have me as its president for some of the more exciting years of my life, was still very far away from my daily occupations in 1970.

My father (who, by the way, had said to me, ‘Don’t worry, you don’t stand a chance of being elected in Würzburg’) always had the fondest memories of all the years he devoted to IBBY and of the deep friendships which, thanks to the frequent meetings, he struck up with exceptional people like Jo Tenfjord, Otto Binder, Bettina Hürlimann, Richard Bamberger – people whom he liked and respected and who, I know it well, liked and respected him in the same way.

***He was a true  
Renaissance man,  
perhaps one of the last*** :

I met many of them in my IBBY years, and working with them was also my privilege; a whole world of idealistic dedication and rich human relations which, albeit in different times, I had the exceptional fortune of sharing with my father.

Over the years, José Miguel de Azaola had become a respected and well-known expert on many subjects: European integration, Basque issues, Spanish politics, history, economics, philosophy, musicology, literature, authors’ rights. Everything interested him. He was a columnist, a poet, a novelist, a literary critic, a translator (he spoke four languages fluently) but also an economist and a philosopher. He founded the first associations promoting Spanish integration in the European Union. He made a huge contribution to the expansion and international influence of the Spanish book industry and trade. And he was in charge of the Authors’ Rights Office at the UNESCO headquarters when he retired. He never stopped working, though. He was a true Renaissance man, perhaps one of the last.

But when he died on 8 September 2007 the shelves in his bedroom still held (and still hold, near my mother) many children’s books in many different languages from all over the world.

*Miguel Azaola*

# Bookbird

A JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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