



Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick

Irish Illustrator Candidate for the

2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award

Biography

Marie-Louise is one of Ireland's foremost children's book authors and illustrators. From a young age she knew she wanted to be an artist and studied design and illustration at the Dublin Institute of Technology (COMAD, DIT). Her artwork is collected by the National Library of Ireland and she was invited to contribute to the international travelling exhibition of Irish picturebook creators **Pictúir** curated by Laureate na nÓg Niamh Sharkey. She has recently completed a 3 year residency funded by the Arts Council of Ireland in Marino Institute of Education, an associated College of Trinity College Dublin. With multiple nominations to the CBI Children's Book Awards, Marie-Louise has come away with the award for Children's Book of the Year on 4 occasions.

Marie-Louise lives and works in Co. Wicklow, Ireland with her husband Michael Emberley also a picturebook maker.

Statement

Curious and thoughtful in her approach, Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick is an exceptional illustrator who has made a lasting contribution both to children's literature and to the lives of children worldwide. The originality of her voice, and gentle sense of humour, together with her deft use of line and colour; and the depth of the characters she creates, have made her a beloved illustrator both at home in Ireland, and abroad.

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick's lifetime dedication to children's literature is outstanding. Fitzpatrick has proven many times over that she understands children: their doubts, fears, their hopes and dreams. She creates a personal and unique universe in her picture books, taking the child's perspective as paramount.

Her originality and versatility is showcased in her body of work. She has illustrated more than 22 books, most of which, she has written too. Fitzpatrick has a powerful imagination, and a curious and philosophical perspective. She uses intricate and sophisticated visual language in her picture books; through her character design, the variance of her layouts, perspectives, and her artistic techniques.

Her ability to freely use different mediums over her illustrative career is impressive. Delicate watercolours in *'The Sleeping Giant,'* assured pencil drawings illuminate *'The Long March,'* and luminous acrylic brushstrokes give warmth and expression to her characters in *'There,'* and *'I am I.'* Fitzpatrick was very proud of these two titles at the time saying, 'I pushed my own boundaries – artistically and subject-wise – and went somewhere new.'

Fitzpatrick has continued to push boundaries over the last few years, mastering a digital painterly woodcut style in her wordless picture book *'Owl Bat Bat Owl,'* proving very comfortable in both the traditional and digital world. Fitzpatrick treats her audience with respect in her illustrations; her perception, compassion and warmth are woven through her books. Her ideas are often simple, but she executes them with empathy. *'Izzy and Skunk'* has been used with young people by psychiatrists, and *'There'* is used in classrooms to introduce kids to philosophy. In 2008 Marie-Louise was honoured to contribute an illustration to *'We Are All Born Free'* a picture book depicting the Universal Declaration Of Human Rights. It was published to great acclaim and had many international editions.

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick has 'a particular eye,' she has the ability to capture the thoughts that go through a young child's mind. She uses the child's viewpoint to great effect in her illustrations - often juxtaposing the real world alongside the imaginative. This illustrative technique is her power

tool, and I believe one of the reasons why both children and adults connect strongly with her work. Fitzpatrick also has the ability to create silent pivotal scenes that strengthen the emotional connection with the child reader. This was used to great effect in *'I am I'* and in her silent picture book *'Owl Bat Bat Owl.'*

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick is a master when it comes to charting the personal journeys we make in early childhood, the small events that change us, the little battles and triumphs we encounter as we grow up.

I believe that her illustrations and books have a lasting appeal, a universality, and that she has contributed hugely both to children's literature, and to making the world, for children, a better place.

Niamh Sharkey is an award-winning author and illustrator of children's picture books and creator and executive producer of Disney Junior's animated preschool series Henry Hugglemonster. Niamh is the former Children's Laureate of Ireland (2012-2014).

Picturing Imaginosity

The Illustrator's Perspective

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick

IN January 2007 I found myself in a boardroom, sitting at a boardroom table. Two weeks before, the woman on the phone had introduced herself as Orla Kennedy and explained that she was involved in creating a children's museum called Imaginosity. She needed a style guide for the graphics package and would I be interested in doing it? I wasn't sure I had the faintest notion what she was asking me to do, but it sounded interesting so I had said yes. Now here I was looking around the table at fabricators from the UK, graphic designers from Cork, project managers, a property developer and having a 'what on earth am I doing here' moment. Should I apologise for the mistake and leave? Too late! Someone was asking me a question...

Meetings in boardrooms are not part of the job description of a children's writer / illustrator, but over the next six months twice-weekly meetings around large tables would become my norm. The graphic designers and myself had, it seemed, until March to produce the full graphics package. We decided that I would concentrate on developing some characters for the museum and the designers, Greenhouse Design, would work on the design of the signs themselves: shape, typeface and colours.

I played with using child characters but that threw up problems. How many would I need to create

to make sure that all ages (0-12), both sexes, different nationalities and a variety of disabilities were represented? The answer was too many. In the end I settled on three creatures – a dog-like creature, a boy alien, and an animated paint splatter. With a nod to the museum's name, the space dog is called Maj (she's a feisty girl-dog) and the boy alien is called Osity, giving us 'Maj n' Osity'. Ba-doom!

“ With a nod to the museum's name, the space dog is called Maj and the boy alien is called Osity, giving us 'Maj n' Osity'. Ba-doom! ”

The paint splatter is called Splodge. Osity is designed around the museum logo, with a spray of swirls and spots mimicking that logo as a headdress. Meanwhile Greenhouse had come back with their concepts for the signs and we were finally ready to tackle 'the matrix'.

For me the word 'matrix' no longer conjures Keanu Reeves striding down dark corridors in a long black coat. It will always be a multicoloured, multilined, multipaged, ever-changing,



ever-growing grid covered in miniscule text. I had my own vertical column, which cross-referenced an alarming number of times with the text in the horizontal columns. Several months later, and seven versions on, it had become as familiar as the map of Ireland, but it had an alarming tendency to mutate. In order to stop myself being overwhelmed by the darn thing, I made my own version, just my verticals and horizontals over four A4 sheets with boxes for ticking off roughs, finished art, delivery and invoicing.

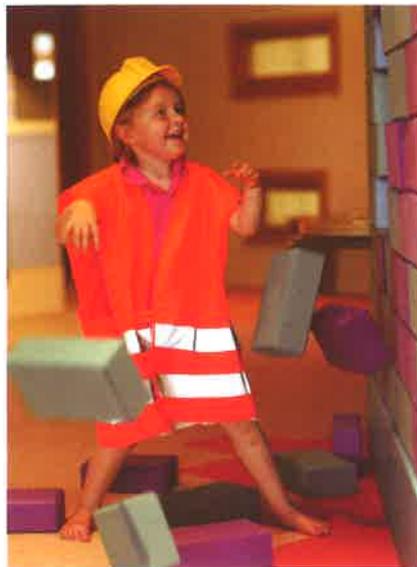
At moments of stress my petite-matrix calmed me down as I marked off each completed illustration. Unfortunately, the list kept growing so that as I neared the end, the end kept getting further away!

Eventually we all hit a rhythm. There were still regular meetings to go over the signs that were at completion and tackle the next section of the matrix, tweaking the wording and deciding on accompanying graphics. I was belting out illustrations over six and seven day weeks, working to

ten at night, sometimes to two in the morning. Meanwhile there were other illustrations stacking up – vegetables, food pyramids, and, always lurking in the background, the wall-mural designs, the theatre backdrops, etc. March had come and gone. It didn't matter that Greenhouse and myself had only gotten the package halfway – the fabricators were behind schedule and weren't ready to tackle the signs. Meanwhile the building itself was progressing. Hard hat, site boots, high-viz jacket on and my vertigo reined in, I even went up on the roof each time to see where the Eco Badger was going to live.

“ The Eco Badger was the character who would represent the green aspects of the museum building ”

The Eco Badger was the character the Imaginosity people had decided would represent the green aspects of the museum building. There are solar panels to heat water, wind turbines for electricity, wind catchers for ventilating specific areas of the building, while the second 'skin' of the building ventilates the rest. When I came on board, a graphic designer had already had a go at creating a whole family of super-badgers to teach children about green energy. In my redesign I revised the concept to a single, wise, elderly badger in overalls. Two reasons for that – our traditional idea of badgers as 'old Brock' and wanting to introduce old age into this chil-



dren's building and connect it with up-to-date technology, practical know-how and wisdom.

Having completed the character design I now needed to understand the technology these signs were explaining. I happily took full charge of this project – I was on old home ground here having spent many years illustrating primary school textbooks in an earlier existence. Orla and I sat down with the engineers and quizzed them. How did that work, give me a rough sketch of this and that, which way does that go ... I took notes and went away and did a first set of roughs. Another meeting, with revised sketches and a whole list of more specific questions, nailed the visuals. Orla, the engineer and myself went over the text to make sure it was technically correct and child friendly at the same time. A meeting with the sign fabricator sorted out limitations on size and design. All questions answered, on to finished art. The illustrations of Eco Badger were hand-painted; the technical drawings hand-drawn in outline, then scanned into my computer and coloured in Photoshop. All the illustrations and the overall design went to

Greenhouse where Pierette and Peter put them together and we emailed back and forth until we found the right typefaces and everything was in its place. And with the end of the Eco Badger signs, I was finished.

It had all been hugely enjoyable. I had stepped out of my usual solitary writer /illustrator existence into a tiger-economy project involving working with a team of people, a specific brief, time pressure, working lunches, boardrooms, matrices and sharp learning curves. I was using all my skills, old as well as new, and firing on all cylinders. Instead of the slow feedback of children's book illustration, instant gratification! I watched a very special place come together and saw how the work and skills of hundreds of people came together to create it. Watching Orla at work was fascinating. She was one woman with a dream, and her energy and ability to hold a zillion things in her head at one time were amazing. Mind you, trying to get her to concentrate for two minutes on one thing – the one thing I wanted her to think about – now that could be a challenge!

For me Imaginosity has been an unexpected adventure. May the building always be full of children laughing as they learn.

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick is an award-winning children's author/illustrator. Her first book, *An Chanáil*, was published in 1988 and won several awards including the RAI book award and a Bisto Book of the Decade award. *The Sleeping Giant* and *The Long March* have won Bisto merit awards while *Izzy and Skunk* (2002) and *You, Me and the Big, Blue Sea* (2002) have both won Bisto Book of the Year. Her recent picturebooks include *Silly Mummy*, *Silly Daddy* and *I Am I* in 2006 and *Silly School* in 2007. She is currently working on a picturebook called *There* and a novel called *Ghostboy*.

The books that brought me here

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick

Award-winning illustrator and author, Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick, recalls her earliest book and picture memories and rediscovers some of her early influences. From Granny's lap through a difficult but short transition to independent reader to novel-hungry teen, Marie-Louise's experiences are uniquely hers yet have resonances for anyone whose childhood included Enid Blyton!

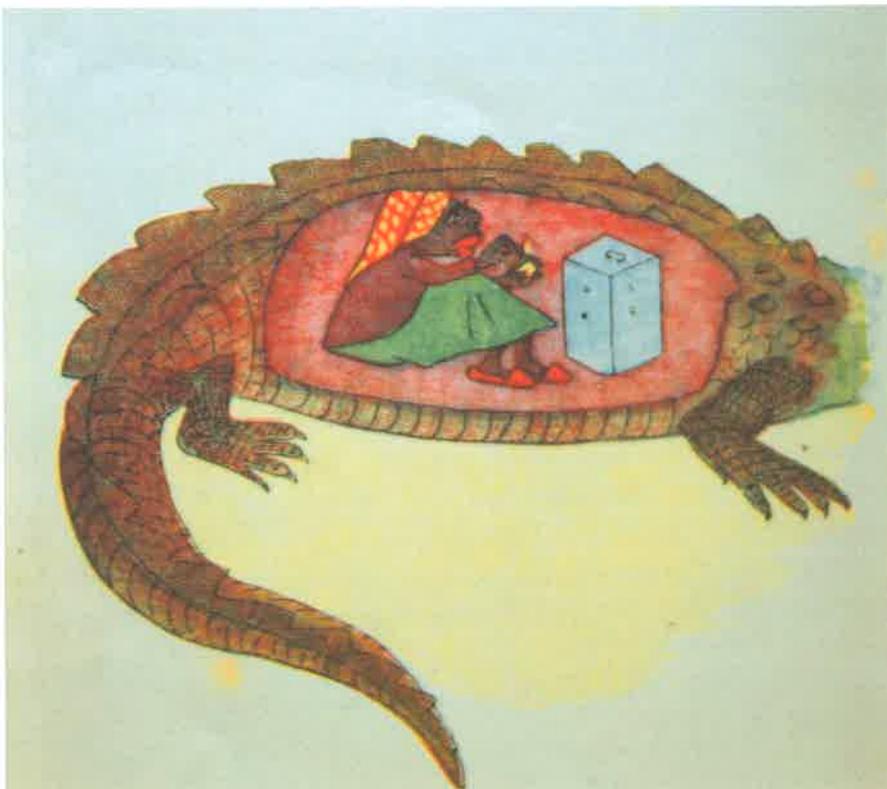


IN my first conscious memory of holding a book in my hand I am 2 years old; I am sitting in a hospital bed with my left arm in plaster and my mother has handed me two little books and an orange sent in to me by a neighbour. As the youngest of three girls in a book-loving family there is a fair-sized library of already-read books at home but these books are the first I recog-

“ I have a clear memory of my Gran reading me this book on a sunny day in one of the green armchairs ”

nise as mine; my books, my orange. I can see them in my hand; the little light paper covers are cut to the shape of the pictures, the little girls are wearing old-fashioned crinolines, the colours are pastel, there is a bumpy texture to the paper. I wonder how I am going to eat the orange with one hand.

I don't remember where the picturebooks were kept at home. There must have been a shelf or a box. I only ever remember meeting them on the floor or in the hands of the adult reading to me and I met them everyday. *The Story of Little Black Mingo* I met on my Granny's knee. I was taken by the book's smallness and the knowledge that it had belonged to my mother when she was a little girl. I have a clear memory of my Gran reading me this book on a sunny day in one of the green armchairs. I remember not wanting her to read on and not wanting her to stop. I needed to know if the Muger (crocodile), which had broken through little Mingo's chatty (jar), would make good his



threat and eat her up. Would she get away from the horrid old woman? Would Mongoose eat all the mugger eggs or would the eggs hatch and all the little muggers eat Mingo? The little pictures were so expressive and simple. The one of the angry mugger swallowing the old lady feet first in revenge for the loss of *his* baby muggers and the next of the old lady inside his tummy lighting the match so that she could see where she was, unaware that the mugger's teeth had pierced the kerosene tin he swallowed with her, made me squeal. The resulting



Caroline's Tea Party was another huge favourite. The bright yellow book was full of fantastic pictures of a little girl and her cat pals. Caroline throws a party and she and the cats punt along a river lit by fairy lights, then jam the night away, Caroline thumping furiously on a grand piano and the cats jiving and playing bass and clarinet – cats' scat of the musical variety.

The Colour Kittens by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Alice and Martin Provensen, is 'a child's first book about colours'. Hush and Brush are trying to find

“ I don't remember the stories, just the lovely pictures, the little elf boy of the title with his mop of blue hair

explosion of mugger and old lady bits was not likely to feature in any of my more contemporary picturebooks, I can tell you! And while I was happy to get to the end and find Mingo and Mongoose alive and using the mugger's head as a seat on which to have their tea, I could never quite stop myself feeling that Mingo shouldn't have helped Mongoose eat all the little muggers, making big Muger cry.

'He roared and he raged, he howled and he yelled, till the whole island shook, and his tears ran down his cheeks

and pattered on the sand like rain.' No crocodile tears, those.

Now I see that inside the cover above my mother's name is that of Granny's sister, Queenie, making the book at least one hundred years old.

Compared to it *The Rainbow Tales* were pure saccharine, but I don't remember the stories, just the lovely pictures, the little elf boy of the title with his mop of blue hair and pictures of doe-eyed Scandinavian children, a Saint Bernard dog, kites and fountains.

“ Purple as violets, purple as prunes, purple as shadows on long afternoons ”

the colour green and along the way find pink and purple and orange. The artwork is simple, sophisticated and fresh at the same time; if the book wasn't so battered it could pass for a product of the recent retro trend but its original publication date is 1949 – not that our copy is *quite* that old. The text is lovely; the coloured objects not always the old predictable ones.

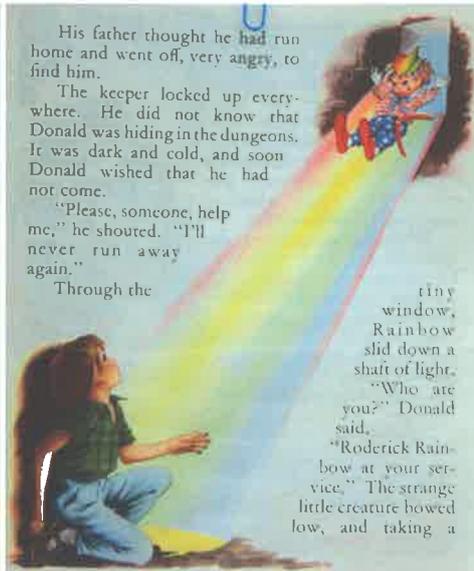
'Purple as violets, purple as prunes, purple as shadows on long afternoons.'

These were the standout picturebooks amongst the heap on the floor, the agreed favourites. There were plenty of *Ladybirds*, a lovely die-cut





Illustration from *The Story of Little Black Mingo*



A page from *The Rainbow Tales*



Pages from *The Colour Kittens* by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Alice and Martin Provensen



Pages from *The Colour Kittens* by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Alice and Martin Provensen

Night Before Christmas with very American children and stockings and a clapperboard house, traditional fairy tales, annuals, comics and summer specials. But I couldn't read any of them on my own. Much as I wanted to I just couldn't learn to read. I was in first class and daydreaming through the endless repetitions of Peter and Jane and Pat, the bloomin' dog. I was standing in the dunce's corner most days for not being able to read my line when it came my turn. Not that my turn came very often in a class of 52. I remember the teacher becoming very irate one day when I slowly sounded out *was* for *saw*. My family despaired of me ever learning the alphabet and ganged up on me one weekend (mother, father, sisters and Dino, the dog), until I just about had that off, at least. But reading still eluded me. All Bernardine's Enid Blyton's were lined up waiting, but if I couldn't string the painful words into sentences in the school reader how would I ever read a 'real' book? The Ladybird illustrations were excellent but I hated perfect Jane in her yellow dress and smarmy Peter in his red pullover. I forgave the red setter because he was a dog and he usually did his best to liven up his owners' mind-numbingly boring exploits.

Then one day the teacher announced that special books were being sold for the advanced readers in the school. The advanced readers were to ask at home and if their parents wanted them to have this extra book, they were to bring in 2/6 the next day. Oh, how I wanted that book; it had a wizard on the cover. And, oh, how I wanted to be an advanced reader. I begged my mother, I pleaded. She shook her

head, pointing out that I couldn't read at all, but eventually gave in. It would be the first and the toughest of the many, many times that I would beg a book. After this one, cajoling a new book out of my parents usually took all of five minutes; I honestly think they saw leaving a child with nothing to read as a form of child neglect.

I marched up to the teacher's desk next day with my 2/6 and claimed my *Green Reader*. Miss Farrelly threw up her eyes. At home, that afternoon, I sat down with the book in my lap. This wasn't Peter and Jane. There were 142 pages and very few pictures. Each page had at least a hundred words on it; I could feel the panic rising. My mother would kill me if I didn't read it but, more importantly, I needed to read it; I needed the words to come together so badly. And, just like magic, they did. I read the first three stories one after the other, without stopping. Forty-three pages – without even thinking about it. The best story was 'Sandy the Sailor Dog'. I was completely astonished. Only that morning I couldn't read, now I could fly. For the first time in my life I was lost alone in the world of words, and, oh boy, did it feel good. Enid Blyton, here I come.

My family insist to this day that I read nothing but Enid until I was 13 but that's not true. Certainly I read and reread her by the cartload; my favourites were the *Famous Fives* and the *Adventurous Four* and the *Twins at Saint Claire's*.



“The best story was ‘Sandy the Sailor Dog’. I was completely astonished. Only that morning I couldn't read, now I could fly”



But my sisters' shelves held other treasures and I read them all. The *Katy* books, *Little Women* and *Anne of Green Gables* were Siobhán's, and Bernardine's shelves had Noel Streatfeild's and Malcolm Saville's. I don't know who was responsible for the Patricia Lynch's – those I had to be force-fed. Whenever I complained of having nothing to read, the family would point to her substantial section of the bookshelves and I would have to plough through *The Grey Goose* or *The Bookshop on the Quay* before I could claim another 2/6 to run across the road to Dowling's Newsagents. Dowling's walls were lined with jars of sweets and toys and cotton handkerchiefs, but in the middle of the floor there were some twirly white stands and one of these held children's books, mainly Enid's. I must have easily tripled the Blyton section of the Fitzpatrick library, I certainly hugely expanded the Elinor M Brent-Dyer *Chalet School* collection but I also developed a

passion for legends – Irish, Roman, Greek and best of all, the tales of Arthur's Round Table. I read every version I could lay my hands on. I cried and cried over Rosemary Sutcliff's version of *Tristan & Iseult* and hugely admired (and tried to emulate) the illustrations by Victor Ambrus.

I liked my novels well illustrated or not illustrated at all. I hated when the cover illustrations

and the inside ones didn't match up and still think it unforgivable of publishers to put a really good illustration on the cover and not-so-good ones inside. It feels like being cheated; it is being cheated, dammit. Some covers caused confusion – one of the Chalet School books had a trendy, cool cover showing Jo in polo neck and mini skirt but inside, suddenly and unexpectedly, it was World War II.

I became a very acquisitive book owner; I hated to lose books to the non-returning borrower, I loved to see my collection grow. I quietly moved some of my favourite books from my sisters' shelves to mine. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Peter Pan and Wendy* jumped from the middle shelf to the bottom one joining *Seven Little Australians* and the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, the spines getting more and more creased with each rereading. For some reason I

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didn't need to own the *Doctor Dolittle* books; the library did fine for those, and for *Nancy Drew*.

I discovered *Swallows and Amazons* too late to read more than four in the series; primary school was over and I was on my way to secondary school. I was 12 now, no more children's books.

In Rang Lorcán we quickly realised that we, as a class, were collectively in the dunce's corner! We had chosen to do Art, Home Ec. and Commerce over German, Latin and Biology, thereby bracketing ourselves as severely lacking in the academic sense. I wonder what the teachers would have said if they had known we had set up our own secret library in the classroom cupboard?

With great excitement we each brought in a favourite book and the class captain took charge of keeping tabs on who borrowed what. Someone

brought in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and this is where I first came across the *Twelfth of July* books. I probably donated a Jean Plaidy; much to my family's amusement I had jumped straight from Blyton to adult fiction in that summer between schools. I would read about a dozen of her books, then move on to Leon Uris, Frederick Forsythe, Richard Adams and the Brontës – a fairly logical progression, actually! At 15, I would hand over my Plaidy collection to a visiting American priest who had professed a passion for them. He was delighted; I was smug. I wondered at a middle-aged man having such immature reading tastes. I wondered if he was obliged to skip the bodice-ripping bits.

Looking back, I seem to have spent my entire childhood reading and yet I



know full well I spent it drawing. Another whole childhood was spent playing on the road and another spent indoors, playing make-believe with a large collection of dolls. Yet another was spent daydreaming through the interminably long days of primary school waiting for the bell to ring. I was never that child who longed for the school holidays to be over because I was bored and had nothing to do, not me. There was so much to do; school just got in the way of unfinished books and games and pictures.

Two years ago I showed my sisters the artwork for *I Am I*. The main character is a boy with blue hair.

'But you do know that that's Rainbow, don't you?' they said in unison, referring to that favourite childhood picturebook.



I was stunned. Of course! That's where the idea for the blue hair had come from. I unearthed the old book from the bottom of a press. Much to my surprise, and theirs, Rainbow's hair wasn't blue; it was all the colours of the ... rainbow! I had unconsciously recreated a character from childhood and in so doing recreated him just as incorrectly as I remembered him!

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick is an award-winning children's author/illustrator. Her first book, *An Chanáil*, was published in 1988 and won several awards including the RAI book award and a Bisto Book of the Decade award. Her second book, *The Sleeping Giant*, is set in Kerry, while her third, *The Long March*, is set in Oklahoma and tells the story of the Choctaw famine gift. Both books won Bisto merit awards and *The Long March* is a Smithsonian Notable Book and an IBBY Book.

Izzy and Skunk (Bisto Book of the Year 2001) was published by Gullane, UK, followed by *I'm a Tiger Too*; *You, Me and the Big, Blue Sea* (Bisto Book of the Year 2003) and illustrations for *Jasmine's Lion* (Random House, UK). 2006 saw the publication of *Silly Mummy, Silly Daddy* (Frances Lincoln, UK) and *I Am I*, (Roaring Brook, USA), and *Silly School* (Frances Lincoln, UK) was published in 2007. Her books are published in several languages around the world, including Dutch, Danish and Korean.

She is currently working on a picture-book called *There*, a novel called *Ghostboy*, and the graphic package for a children's museum called 'Imaginosity'.

Our woman in London

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know, it is tiring being nice all the time, especially if it isn't your natural inclination. The Talent, by which I mean the Author, or, if you want to be really offensive, the Product, is a whole other challenge. The Good Publicist will, in addition to the obligatory credit cards, carry at all times homeopathic remedies (mainly for pre-talk nerves and panic attacks), Solpadeine, Nurofen and several other brands of painkillers suitable for hangovers and headaches (for both author and publicist); herbal and fruit teas (you'd be amazed how many writers like a peppermint or a camomile and spiced apple instead of a Tetley's); tissues, for the sniffles brought on by authors having to engage with other

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humans and their germs (they have probably been in a writing shed for the past year); mascara (I recommend Chanel); gel pens (writers are pen thieves and you can never have enough of these); mobile phone of course (but never ever answer one while in a public loo. I made this mistake once, automatically answering and then sat on the loo talking to Author, terrified that the person in the next cubicle would flush! The other place one should never

answer a mobile phone is in the bath, especially when it is a key customer and you are trying desperately not to slosh the bath-water while discussing the latest Darren Shan tour schedule, for example.) But I digress. Authors are rare and wonderful creatures and it is an amazing thing to sit down every day and keep writing, and make a book. It is a scary thing to send it out into the world to be judged. And I suppose that is what unites everyone in the publishing industry, whether author, agent, or publisher – a love of books. It is a great leveller, and the defining characteristic of those who stick around in the business for any length of time, in any role – the book is the thing. The magic of stories. So yes, hey, you know what? I've got a great job. If you think you can do it, the publishing industry needs you.

Close-up: Living Irish Illustrators 3: Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick

Lucinda Jacob

ONE of our most successful and long-established writer-illustrators, Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick has been creating award-winning picture books for over fifteen years now. She lives and works in Dublin, where she trained in visual communication at the College of Marketing and Design (now part of the Dublin Institute of Technology), and indeed her first book, *An Chanáil*, was set in Dublin.

There was such excitement when it came out! Winner of the Reading Association of Ireland book award and Bisto Book of the Decade 1980-90 (Irish-language category) it was published by An Gúm in 1988, and I still remember well the thrill of picking it up in the bookshop and realising as I opened it that here was a groundbreaking title. It was the first time, as far as I could remember, that a recognisable local landscape was used in an Irish picturebook, and with a narrative that was clearly contemporary. No matter that I would have to get out a dictionary to read

it – my Irish isn't great but I wasn't going to let that stop me. Places such as 'The Dungeon' one of the terraced houses, bedecked in bric-à-brac and in itself a work of 'Outsider Art', were obvious to me as a local (I lived in Rathmines at the time) and are particular to the place. Moreover, considering that the book would have a readership beyond the canal communities, these features, which can be recognised only by those who know this stretch of the canal, are used by Fitzpatrick to give a sense of place which is a both setting and starting point for the story.

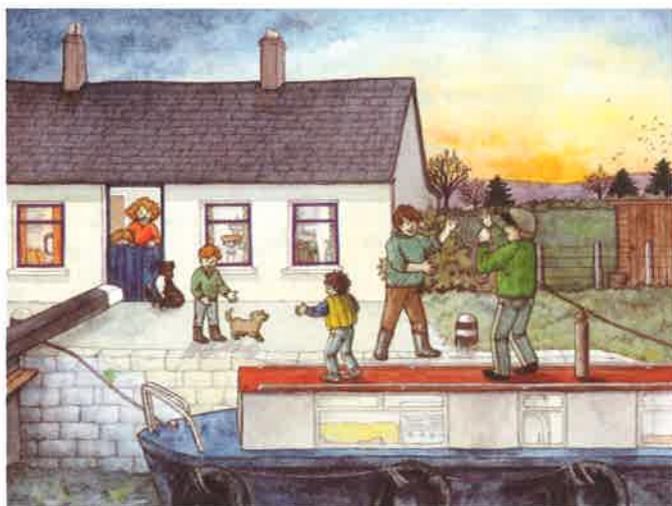


An Chanáil – a groundbreaking title. It was the first time a recognisable local landscape was used in an Irish picturebook



It has been said that the canal is the central character in the story, and perhaps the sheer liveliness of the broad scene makes it seem so.

the words, which means that for some 'readers', including myself, the canal is writ large. However, a great strength of Marie-Louise



“
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Fitzpatrick is her
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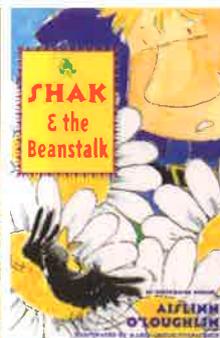
Fitzpatrick is her narrative skill. She does know how to tell a story – in this case, the story of a dog lost and found and the trip that its young owner takes in a canal barge to thank the people who found him way out on a rural stretch of the canal.

Fitzpatrick's second title, *The Sleeping Giant*, published initially by Brandon Press in Dingle in 1991 and later by Wolfhound (now Merlin), is also rooted in a real place: the sleeping giant is actually an island off the Dingle peninsula known locally as 'the dead man' – exciting again for our little family as we recognised it from our holidays. Anecdote aside, it was also something completely new to Irish readers: a large-format, full-colour picture-book by an Irish author, set in Ireland. Looking back on that book now, it is clear that Marie-Louise was cutting her teeth on these early titles. She is more trusting of her pencil line in these illustrations than she was in *An Chanáil*, and she no longer feels the need to outline the figures in ink. The story is stronger too. My then 4-year-old took it entirely in her stride, and really hers was the target age. It is a child who solves the giant's



problem, and in this Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick shows an evident and early understanding of the importance of the centrality of the child in children's books. Interestingly, the book proved really quite scary for my 2-year-old, as the giant rose up out of the sea and created havoc in the modern landscape full of holiday-makers. Unable to articulate it at the time, the same daughter, now 15, thinks it was the poignancy of

ing on her picturebooks Fitzpatrick has worked on a number of other projects, producing numerous covers for books by other authors, such as Maeve Friel's *The Deerstone* and many titles for Wolfhound Press, notably illustrating Aislinn O'Loughlin's humorous series of inverted fairy tales in jaunty black and white line drawings, and several titles for Poolbeg Press, including *Anna's Six Wishes* by Margrit Cruickshank. In all of these, her ink drawings serve to entertain and ease the eye of the reasonably confident new reader. Other bread-and-butter projects included illustrations for a reading scheme featuring the characters Emma and Joe, and here she was an inspired choice. Champions of 'real' books in teaching children to read often cite the fact that in picturebooks, as opposed to 'readers', the pictures support the reader, as they carry meaning – often as much meaning as or more meaning than the words them-



the giant's situation (he's too big to fit into our world and has to be persuaded back out of it) that made it all the more affecting, making him more real and thus more scary despite his benign, rather cuddly appearance.

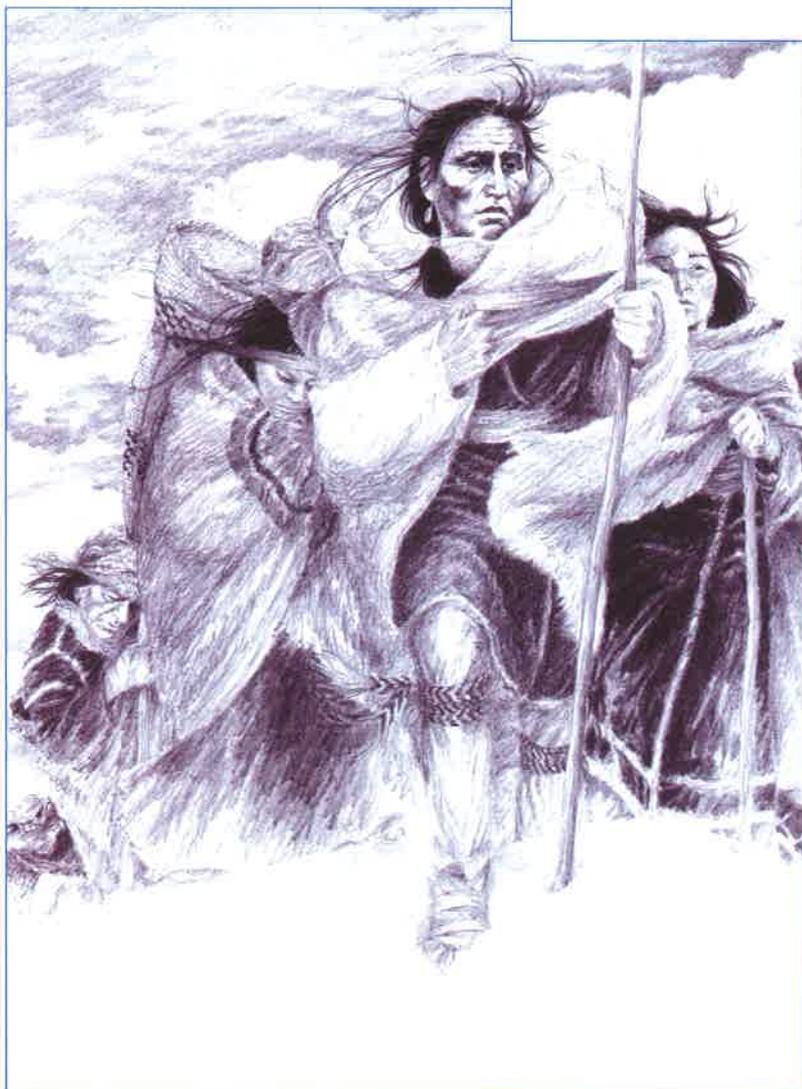
Between, or rather while work-

selves do – and Fitzpatrick was certainly alive to her experience as picturebook-maker in her approach to these titles. So often, young children find that the reduced text can be difficult enough to decode and the judicious use of well-matched illustration makes the task of learning to read so much easier. In 1991 she illustrated the poetry anthology *Rusty Nails and Astronauts*, edited by Robert Dunbar

“
The Sleeping Giant was also something
completely new to Irish readers”

and Gabriel Fitzmaurice and published by Wolfhound. Some of the illustrations are colour, but most are black-and-white wash, giving shades of grey. Colour or not, they are all sensitive. I am glad to say she avoids an interpretive approach: there is nothing worse than feeling you are being led by the nose when you are reading a poem!

Her next picturebook, *The Long March*, was again an arresting piece of work and with its appearance it became clear to those who follow these things that this was a writer-illustrator who is not afraid to pursue a train of thought that, though fascinating to her, might not at first seem a likely subject for a picturebook. And she is not afraid to set herself some stiff challenges in the process. The story is based on a snippet from the margins of the history books, namely the astonishing fact that in 1847, when the Native American



“

A writer-illustrator who is not afraid to pursue a train of thought that might not at first seem a likely subject for a picturebook

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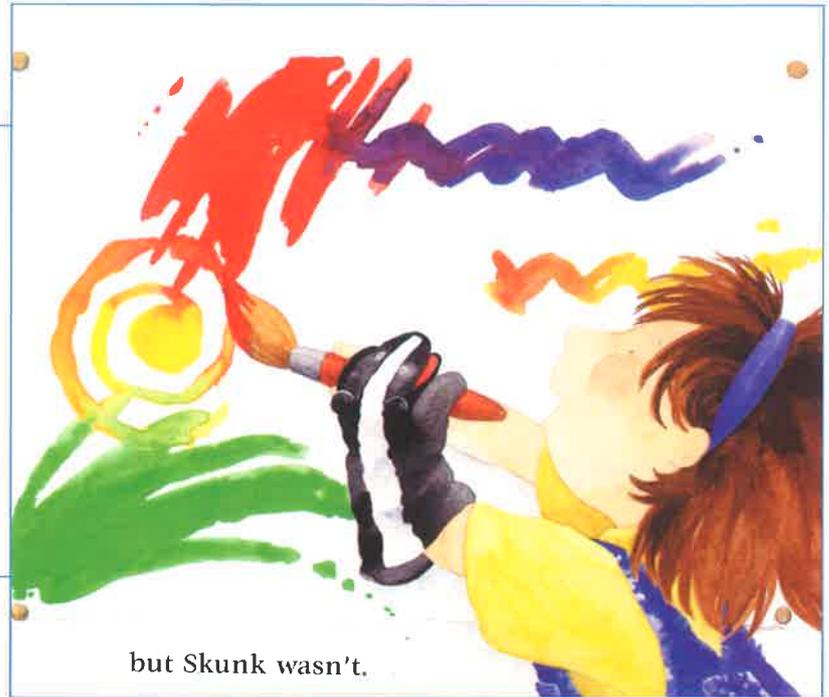
Choctaw people heard of the potato famine here in Ireland, they responded by raising \$170. They were by no means wealthy themselves, and their motivation seems to have stemmed from feelings of empathy for their fellow humans, no matter that they were European and therefore in some sense the enemy. In fact it is the central character's ambivalence in the face of the news from Ireland that makes the story dramatic and holds our attention, as we wonder whether the young man will side with the warlike words or those of compassion. That he does the latter and acts out of altruism is what makes the story important for the reader, and this is the skilled work of Fitzpatrick as storyteller. The Choctaw heard that Irish people were dying as they

walked the roads in search of food and it clearly resonated with their own experience. Marie-Louise initially researched the story from Ireland, but she realised that she needed to go to the Choctaw and speak to them herself. This proved most fruitful, as she was able to take copious photographs for reference and she was able to use real people as models for her char-

acter. The book was published in the day elder dressed, as they all are, in traditional clothing. Fitzpatrick received a number of well-deserved awards for *The Long March* – the Reading Association of Ireland special merit award, the Bisto Book of the Year award and

Year, 2001. In it she returns to the landscape format and to a younger audience. Izzy is scared of things like shadows in the dark, but her toy skunk isn't, and through this narrative, founded on acute observation of how toys are

Izzy was afraid of making mistakes...



but Skunk wasn't.

acters and inspiration for the way she would tell the story. Her choice of pencil rather than colour for the illustration was refreshing and entirely appropriate for such serious subject matter, and it also allowed her to demonstrate her skill in its use.

The illustrations are sensitive and in places she makes great use of the white space on the page. One of my favourite spreads is the one showing the Choctaw struggling uphill across the page in a strong diagonal, the desolation of their situation emphasised by the expanse of white. In some portraits the drawing is a bit static, and is less to my taste, but this is a matter of taste and it is something that is almost impossible to avoid when one is trying to be true to a photographic reference. Having said that, I can only admire the magnificent drawing of the grandmother, a modern-

mention on the IBBY honour list, and with it she entered the American market for the first time.

Izzy and Skunk, her next picture-book, was published in America as well as in Britain and Ireland (for some reason best known to themselves Dorling Kindersley published it as *Lizzy and Skunk*) and it won the Bisto Book of the

used by young children as vehicles for emotions that they find difficult to articulate, Izzy deals with her fears as she explores the world about her in a busy, robust manner. This empowering text is enlivened by illustrations which show a new fluidity of line and sureness of touch in the use of watercolour, which is evident in all Fitzpatrick's subsequent work to date.

I'm a Tiger Too! was short-listed for the Bisto Book of the year in 2002, and again it is a picturebook for younger children. Again Marie-Louise shows her instinct for what is important to children of this age and the story is a deceptively simple one where the make-believe becomes real, as the lonely little boy at the centre imagines playing

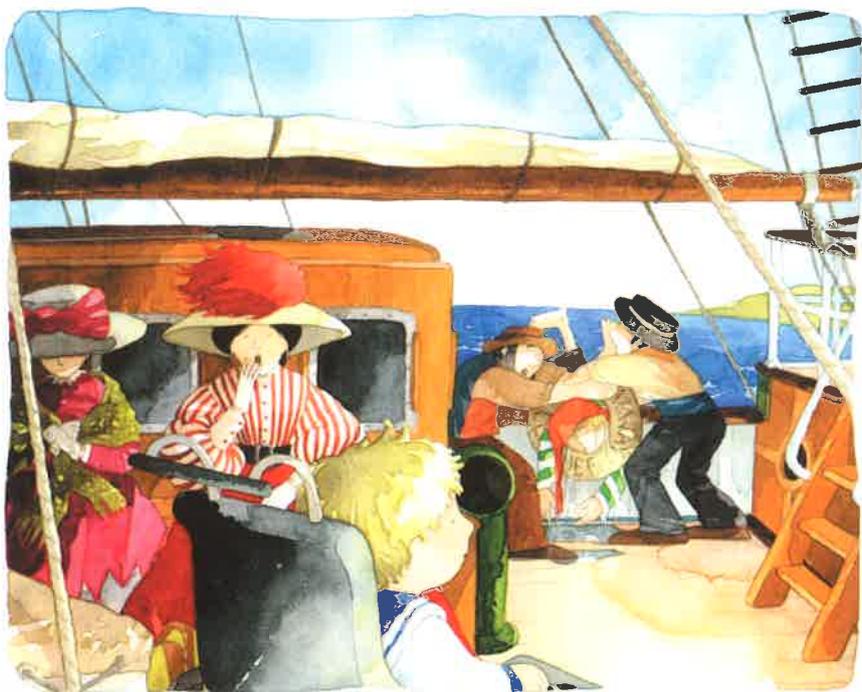
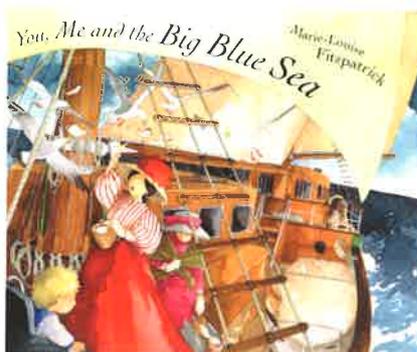


"I'm a boy," said the boy.



"I'm a boy like you."

“
You, Me and the
Big Blue Sea –
absolutely
scintillating ...
nicely arch ...
utterly delicious”



with a cat-become-tiger, a dog-become-wolf and so on until he meets another little boy with whom he can really play ‘tigers’. The overall design is a delight, and together with Fitzpatrick’s fluid line and the sure use of watercolour mentioned earlier, it is one of those productions where everything seems to be in place and all the elements are pulling together to tell the story in such a way as to be almost invisible to the reader. It just seems right.

With *You, Me and the Big Blue Sea*, Marie-Louise’s storytelling skills are again to the fore. I do not mean by this that the writing takes precedence. Far from it: much of the meaning is conveyed by the illustration and it sets up a tension between text and picture which

makes the book absolutely scintillating. I am aware that this description may seem overblown, but I believe this is the essence of what is meant when people talk of the ‘excitement’ of reading, whether you are reading words or pictures or, as in this case, both. The writing is nicely arch, with an adult narrator giving a voiceover to the illustrations which show rather more to the reader than the narrator is herself aware of, thus showing that she, the adult, has missed the point! This is, of course, utterly delicious for the child reader and a classic element in books for children. It was the joint winner of the Bisto Book of the Year 2003 and is published in Britain by Gullane and in the US by Roaring Brook.

BOOKS BY MARIE-LOUISE FITZPATRICK

The first publisher is given in each case, though there may be subsequent editions, sometimes in different territories. Where two editions came out simultaneously, the Irish edition is given here.

- An Chanáil* (An Gúm 1988)
- The Sleeping Giant* (Brandon 1991)
- The Long March* (Wolfhound (Merlin) 1998)
- Izzy and Skunk* (Gullane 1999)
- I’m a Tiger Too!* (Wolfhound (Merlin) 2001)
- You, Me and the Big Blue Sea* (Gullane 2002)

BOOKS ILLUSTRATED BY MARIE-LOUISE FITZPATRICK

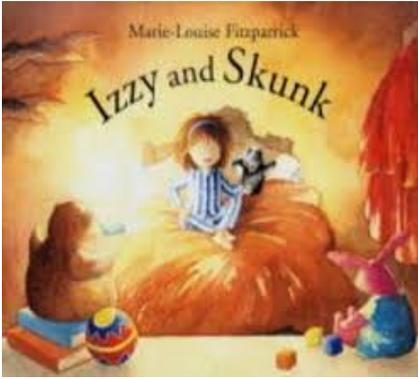
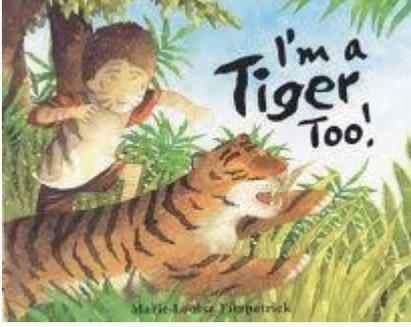
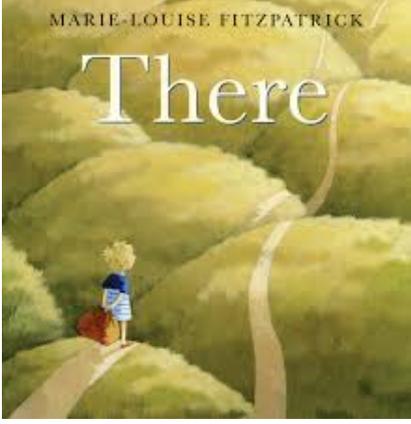
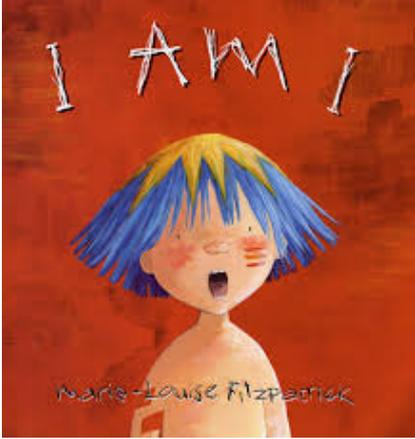
- Maeve Friel *The Deerstone* (Poolbeg 1992) – cover only
- Aislinn O’Loughlin *Cinderella’s Fella* (1995)
- A Right Royal Pain* (1996)
- The Emperor’s Birthday Suit* (1996)
- Shak & the Beanstalk* (1997)
- Fionn the Cool* (1998)
- all published by Wolfhound (Merlin)
- Margrit Cruickshank *Anna’s Six Wishes* (Poolbeg 1995)
- Robert Dunbar and Gabriel Fitzmaurice (eds) *Rusty Nails and Astronauts* (Wolfhound (Merlin) 1999)
- Pamela Duncan Edwards *Dear Tooth Fairy* (Katherine Tegen 2003)

Fitzpatrick continues to illustrate occasionally for other authors and her latest, *Dear Tooth Fairy*, written by Pamela Duncan Edwards and published by Katherine Tegen Books, is so far only available in the US.

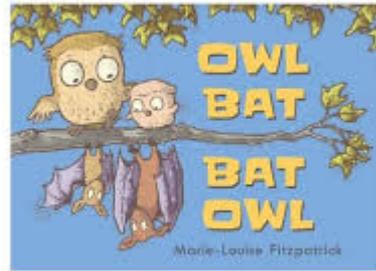
Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick has not yet produced a book that has *not* won awards, and it is a credit to her dedication to her craft and her career that she is at last achieving the international recognition that she deserves.

Author’s note: Many thanks to Rosemary Hetherington of the Young People’s and Schools section, Dublin City Libraries, and to Liz Turley formerly of the same section, for their help in providing access to Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick’s titles.

List of the 5 books sent to the jurors.

<p>Izzy and Skunk</p>	
<p>I'm a tiger too!</p>	
<p>There</p>	
<p>I am I</p>	

Owl Bat Bat Owl



Ten of the most important titles by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick

An chanáil (An Gúm, 1988)

The sleeping giant (Brandon Press, 1991)

The long march (Wolfhound, 1997/Tricycle Press)

Izzy and Skunk (Gullane, UK, 2000)

I'm a tiger too! (Gullane, UK, 2001)

You me and the big blue sea! (Gullane, UK, 2002)

I am I (Roaring Brook Press, 2006)

There (Roaring Brook Press, 2009)

The new kid (Hodder Children's 2014)

Owl Bat, Bat Owl (Walker Books, 2016)

Bibliography

An Chanáil	1988
Sleeping giant	1991; 2002
Cinderella's fella	1995
A right royal pain : Rumpelstiltskin - the true story	1996
The emperor's birthday suit	1997
Shak and the beanstalk	1997
Fionn the cool	1998
Séanna	1998
The Long March	1997
The Long March	1998
Rusty nails & astronauts : a Wolfhound poetry anthology	1999
Izzy and Skunk	2000
Lisa und Muffel	2000
Stine og Stink	2000
Unknown	2000
I'm a tiger too!	2001
Ich bin auch ein tiger!	2001
Ik ben ook een tijger!	2001
You, me and the big blue sea	2002
Sleeping giant	2002
Jasmine's Lion	2005
Silly Mummy, silly daddy	2006
Silly school	2007
Silly baby	2009
There	2008
La Bas	2008
Pieni Kulkija	2008
I am I	2006
Owl bat, bat owl	2016
Testa in Su, Testa in Giù	2016
Fleder Eule Eulen Maus	2016
Ugle Flagermus Flagermus Ugle	2016
Mijn Tak! Mijn Tak!	2016
New kid	2014

Awards

An Chanáil

Readers Association of Ireland Book Award 1989, Irish Book Awards Design Medal 1989, Bisto Book of the Decade (Irish language) 1990

The Sleeping Giant

Bisto Honour Award, 1992

The Long March

Smithsonian Notable Book 1998, Bisto Honour Award 1999, RAI Special Merit Award 1999, IBBY Honour Book (illustration) 2000

Izzy and Skunk

Bisto/CBI Book of the Year 2001, a Schools & Libraries Best Book 2000 (USA)

I'm a Tiger Too

shortlisted for Bisto/CBI awards 2002

You, Me and the Big Blue Sea

Bisto/CBI Book of the Year 2003

Silly Mammy, Silly Daddy

shortlisted for Irish Book Awards 2006

There

Bisto/CBI Book of the Year 2010, Bisto Illustration Honour Award 2010, a Carle Museum Picture Book of Distinction 2009

Owl Bat Bat Owl

a Junior Library Guild Fall Selection 2017, nominated for the CILIP Kate Greenaway 2018