



**Hans Christian Andersen Award 2018**

ISABELLE ARSENAULT

**Illustrator Nominee  
(Canada)**

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## Introduction

The Hans Christian Andersen Nominating Committee of IBBY Canada is pleased and honoured to introduce Isabelle Arsenault as the illustrator we have selected for consideration by the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen Jury.

Isabelle Arsenault is a well-loved and well-respected illustrator both with her readers and among reviewers from Canada and around the world. In a *New York Times* review (8 April 2016) of *Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois* (2016), Maria Popova declares that Arsenault is “a master of expressive subtlety and one of the most exceptional illustrators of our time.” Popova repeats this praise when listing *Cloth Lullaby* as one of “the best children’s books of 2016”: “Arsenault – whom I have long considered one of the most gifted and unrepeatable artists of our time, the kind whose books will be cherished a century from now – carries the story with her soft yet vibrantly expressive illustrations.” Popova identifies what is most noteworthy about Arsenault’s illustrations: how she tackles and humanizes tough and complex subject matter with a distinctive and evocative style.

While studying Fine Arts and Graphic Design at the Université du Québec à Montréal, Arsenault discovered her passion for illustration. Her skills were quickly recognized among her peers, and she soon gained an international reputation, as attested by the translations listed in this dossier. With 15 illustrated books now to her name, Arsenault has won many awards and earned many distinctions, including being a three-time winner of the prestigious Canadian Governor General’s Literary Award (*Le cœur de monsieur Gauguin*, 2004; *Virginia Wolf*, 2012; *Jane, le renard & moi*, 2012). Both *Migrant* (2011) and *Jane, the Fox & Me* (2013), the English translation of *Jane, le renard & moi*, were on *The New York Times* “Ten Best Illustrated Books” for their respective years. *Jane, le renard & moi* and its English-language counterpart have also won many comic and graphic novel awards for its artistry.

Arsenault’s diverse output is a direct result of her creative process: “I approach each of my books in a different way. Each text invokes a particular universe, and I endeavour to grasp it by adapting my techniques, my renderings and my graphical approach to each project.” The reviews and other accolades included in this dossier confirm that her flexibility as an illustrator of diverse publications — from an alphabet book to a graphic novel to both fictional and non-fictional picture books — has garnered her a wide-ranging audience. Her illustrations, while immediately accessible, leave a lasting impression achieved only through their subtle undercurrents. She has that uncanny ability to tap into her childhood dreams and imaginings and into the minds of her subjects, from artists living on the edge of society – such as Emily Dickinson, Paul Gauguin, Virginia Woolf, and Louise Bourgeois – to displaced children like Hélène and Jane Eyre, the Mexican migrant Anna, and the hybrid Spork. She then renders her characters’ inner landscapes with the skills of a consummate artist so that they elicit a strong empathic response from young and old alike.

IBBY Canada is honoured to nominate Isabelle Arsenault for the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen Award. Her exceptional contribution to the literary and artistic heritage of children’s literature in Canada and internationally makes her a deserving and outstanding candidate.

Dr. Lesley D. Clement



Regional Councillor Ontario  
IBBY Canada Hans Christian Andersen Nomination Committee  
January 2017



# Statement of Contribution to Children's Literature

*Submitted by Professor Perry Nodelman*

An illustrator's main responsibility is to communicate visually the meanings and emotional resonances of a written text produced earlier by someone else. But successful illustrations also express the unique vision of the illustrator; they convey a personal version of the text they relate to that nevertheless accurately represents it. Seen from this perspective, Isabelle Arsenault is a model illustrator. Her work is instantly recognizable as hers, but again and again her pictures offer persuasive insights into texts that tell radically different stories to a range of different audiences. Each of her books expresses someone else's unique vision by means of her own vision.

Arsenault's most characteristic images are minimal, mostly monochromatic cartoons — simplified but very assured outlines of people and their environments. But despite their simplicity, these images often convey intense and surprisingly complex emotions in ways that both express and extend the implications of the texts they accompany. Indeed, Arsenault tends to be more interested in depicting the thoughts and emotions of characters than she is in the more conventional illustrational choice of showing characters in the places and situations that engender the emotions; that is, she is more interested in interior events than in the physical circumstances that lead to them. In her images for Maxine Trottier's *Migrant* (2011), the minimal details of young Anna's actual environment as the child of migrant Mennonite farm workers from Mexico are accompanied by literal depictions of how Anna imagines herself and others — as a jack rabbit or as kittens — or as themselves floating over the tomatoes they are picking but with the wings of bees. When young H el ene imagines in Fanny Britt's *Jane, the Fox & Me* (2013) that the bathing suit she is trying on makes her look like a sausage, Arsenault's images shows her as an actual sausage in a bathing suit and with human arms and legs. Similarly, when Vanessa's sister Virginia wakes up "feeling wolfish" in *Virginia Wolf* (2012), Arsenault depicts her as an actual wolf in a human bedroom. As Vanessa encourages Virginia to join her in imagining the utopian place she calls Bloomsberry, Virginia's resistance to move beyond her depression is signaled by her continuing to appear as a wolf-shaped black silhouette until a final picture in full colour reveals that the two points that have been representing her wolf ears are now the edges of the jaunty bow she wears on top of her happy human head.

This subtle transformation is another example of the economy of Arsenault's work — the ways in which a few simple brush strokes can convey not only a radical change in a character's state of mind but also the nature of that state of mind, the complex thoughts and emotions that it consists of. One particularly significant aspect of Arsenault's economy and the ways in which she marshals it in order to depict and engage complex responses is her use of colour. While most of her images are primarily monochromatic — usually black and/or brown — she often includes just one or two figures in another colour. In her pictures for Jean E. Pendziwol's *Once Upon a Northern Night* (2013), for instance, a primarily black-and-white scene of pine trees weighted down with snow contains just a few branches in green; and on other pages, black-and-white images of rabbits in snow show them with red cheeks, and the half of a fox not blackened by the shadows it hides in is also red. In all these cases, the one added colour both creates a focus for viewers' attention and offers a sense of the lively world of activity and beauty obscured by the night but still able to emerge to attentive viewers. Furthermore, throughout this book, Arsenault offers a variety of skies that relieves the otherwise monochrome nature of the images they appear in by being as purple or as green as the text at these points says they are. These images beautifully underline the contrast between the vivid colours of the Aurora Borealis and the black and white of the snowy nights they appear in.

Arsenault really takes advantage of the intrusion of colour into a monochromatic world in *Virginia Wolf*, in which the primarily black, white, and grey images of Vanessa and Virginia's real world — containing only a few objects in colour — are followed first by images of black silhouettes against white or grey backgrounds that reveal events as perceived through the filter of Virginia's depression and then by the exuberant richness of the flower-filled and multi-coloured Bloomsberry the girls create together. In a variation on this pattern, the beige monochrome of young H  l  ne's lonely life in Arsenault's images for Fanny Britt's *Jane, the Fox & Me* appears in sharp contrast to the deep red and sky blue backgrounds or utopian green landscapes of Jane Eyre's life as H  l  ne imagines it in pages that alternate with those depicting her own experiences. At the end, the lush green trees of Jane Eyre's world invade H  l  ne's monochromatic one and signify the joy she has found in making a new friend.

The shapes of the boughs of those joyful trees echo shapes that appear a few pages earlier, as speech balloons emanating from H  l  ne's new friend's mouth — an ingenious way of implying how this new friend transforms H  l  ne's world. Similarly, but with somewhat different implications, the object Emily Dickinson holds to paper in a vignette at the beginning of Arsenault's collection of Dickinson's poems, *My Letter to the World and Other Poems* (2008), is something like a quill pen, but one with a number of quills, like leaves on a branch; and the branches grow out of the window she sits at and become the leafy background for the poems that follow.

While Arsenault's work is distinguished by its focus on what the people described in a text feel and imagine, she is astute enough to know when not to do that. In *Once Upon a Northern Night*, for instance, the speaker implied by the text often uses poetic metaphors to describe the landscape. There is a blanket of snow, the hands of pine trees are tickled by the wind, the snow is like ice cream. But the speaker of this text is less a character than a guide to ways of thinking about northern lights. Since the emotions of the person who speaks these images is not germane to the text, Arsenault has wisely decided not to duplicate them in her images, which are, this time, quite realistic depictions of a snowfall.

Arsenault's body of work contains books intended for the entire range of young readers: the beginners usually envisaged as the audience for alphabet books (*Alpha* (2014), her depictions of objects suggested by the NATO phonetic alphabet); youngsters being read poems by adults and then beginning to read them on their own (Gilles Tibo's *R  ves d'enfance* (2007), *My Letter to the World and Other Poems*); school age children who might be of an age to identify with Anna of *Migrant* or Vanessa and Virginia of *Virginia Wolf*; older children and teenagers who might identify with H  l  ne of *Jane, the Fox & Me* — not to mention adult aficionados of graphic novels. But it is evidence of Arsenault's astute balance of the simple and complex that all these books might well find readers across a wide range of ages.

Older readers who know something about Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, and the Bloomsbury group might take pleasure in making connections between those real people and the characters Kyo Maclear imagines and Arsenault brings to life in *Virginia Wolf*. But Maclear's characters and Arsenault's images require no such knowledge; they allow both simpler and less informed readings and more complex and more knowledgeable ones. Furthermore, I suspect that the simpler responses will nevertheless include an enticing sense of something more that is yet to be explored and discovered. Arsenault's trust in young readers allows her to suggest the pleasures of a larger world of reference and potentially allows them access to it.

At the other end of the spectrum, similarly, *Alpha* allows both simple responses to the object depicted and a more complex awareness of the cleverness of the relationships between the word on each page and the image accompanying it; between, say, the word "Delta" and the image of a triangular paper airplane that both echoes the shape of the Greek letter delta and evokes the name of an American airline; or between the word "Oscar" and

a picture of the sort of ball gown a woman might wear to the Academy Awards. And once more, young readers unaware of what the Oscars are might well be pleased to learn from an adult sharing the experience of reading *Alpha* why a ball gown evokes them.

The range of the audience Arsenault's work might appeal to transcends geographic borders as well as categories of age. It is telling that Arsenault is one of the Quebec practitioners of literature for young people whose work in French-language texts is frequently republished in English for English-speaking Canadians, and equally telling that many of the books originally published in Canada have been translated into other languages. As distinctive as her style is, and despite or even because it is so grounded in specific times and places, her work speaks to an international audience.

Sincerely,

Perry Nodelman

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Perry Nodelman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Perry" and last name "Nodelman" clearly legible.

Professor Emeritus  
University of Winnipeg



## Biography of Isabelle Arsenault



“I create illustrations based on how each story inspires me.

I like bringing the text to another level through its visuals.

It’s a way to create images that can be appreciated by the eyes,  
but also the brain.”

— Isabelle Arsenault, *The Walrus* (November 22, 2012)

Isabelle Arsenault was born in 1978 in Sept-Îles, Quebec. After studies in Fine Arts and Graphic Design at the Université du Québec à Montréal, she specialized in illustration. Quickly, she gained recognition from the industry and her peers, receiving awards from major international illustration contests including Communication Arts and American Illustration and Applied Arts. Arsenault also won the Grand Prix for illustration (Magazines du Québec) for six years running.

In 2005, Arsenault won the prestigious Governor General’s Literary Award for the illustration of her first children’s book, *Le cœur de monsieur Gauguin* (2004). She has gone on to win the Governor General’s Literary Award for illustrated books two more times for *Virginia Wolf* (2012) and the graphic novel *Jane, le renard & moi* (2012). Two of her picture books – *Migrant* (2011) and *Jane, the Fox & Me* – were named as *New York Times* Best Illustrated Books of the Year.

Arsenault’s passion for children’s imaginations allows her to produce images that appeal to young readers as well as older ones. Her illustrations celebrate the innocence and imagination of childhood, while recognizing the fears and insecurities that children face. Through children’s illustration she gives life to her own childhood dreams and in doing so, she hopes to inspire upcoming generations.

Isabelle Arsenault lives in Montreal, Quebec with her family.



## **Most Significant Titles**

### **My Letter to the World and Other Poems**

(Toronto: Kids Can Press, 2008)

### **Migrant**

(Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2011)

### **Virginia Wolf**

(Toronto: Kids Can Press, 2012)

### **Jane, le renard & moi**

(Montreal: Éditions de la Pastèque, 2012)

### **Once Upon a Northern Night**

(Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2013)



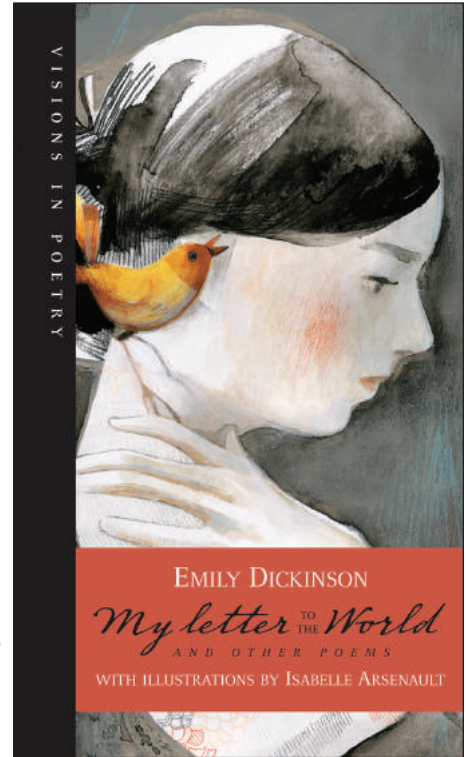
# My Letter to the World and Other Poems (2008)

## Reviews

### *Journal of Education* (Nancy Harayama and Storey Mecoli)

“If nothing else had come out of our life but this strange poetry, we should feel that in the work of Emily Dickinson, America, or New England rather, had made a distinctive addition to the literature of the world, and could not be left out of any record of it.” So commented William Dean Howells, American author and literary critic, about Dickinson’s impact on the literary world (1891, p. 320). More than a century later, readers are still moved by the words of this woman of solitude.

To stimulate the imagination of a new generation of readers, Isabelle Arsenault’s stunning mixed-media illustrations bring to life the powerful words of the poet. *My Letters to the World and Other Poems* features seven of Emily Dickinson’s most iconic poems accompanied by these artful illustrations. This slim volume is one of the Visions in Poetry series, an award-winning collection that aims to provide its readers with contemporary visions of classic poetry. The creators explain their mission as, “to connect with a modern audience—a generation raised on television, computers and graphic novels—each [volume] is a thought-provoking union of text and art that will spark discussion and serve as a springboard for the imagination” (from the book jacket).



This mission is achieved through the pairing of Dickinson’s enduring words and Arsenault’s haunting images. The book itself is beautiful, beginning with the first translucent film-like page. On it is inscribed the name of the poet and her poem that begins, “This is my letter to the World/ That never wrote to Me — .” Through the opaque page, the reader is given the first glimpse of Emily Dickinson, her hair pulled tightly back from her face, her body dressed in its customary white. The reader can see that Dickinson is engrossed in her writing, and that from her pen a vine of words grows, swirling out, down, and toward the reader.

This creative and effective coupling of Dickinson’s words and Arsenault’s images continues throughout the book. As it should be, the illustrations offer the reader another way to appreciate the words, rather than detracting from the words themselves. The featured poems—including “There’s a certain slant of light,” “Because I could not stop for Death,” “I’m Nobody! Who are you?,” and “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers”—flow from one to another without any concerted effort to separate them. The poems are linked by the recurring motifs that Arsenault employs, many drawn from Dickinson’s personal life. Domestic images are prevalent, as are depictions of coffins and graves, frequent subjects in Dickinson’s poetry. The observant reader will notice the careful details that Arsenault supplies. For instance, in one of her poems, Dickinson writes: “I cannot live with You — / It would be Life — / And Life is over there — / Behind the Shelf — / The Sexton keeps the Key to / Putting up / Our Life — His Porcelain — / Like a Cup — / Discarded of the Housewife — / Quaint — or Broke — / A newer Sevres pleases — / Old ones crack — “ (p. 34). On the page next to Dickinson’s poignant words, the reader sees another

depiction of the poet, this one showing her eyes cast downward, color in her cheeks, hands folded demurely on her full white skirt. The sharp-eyed reader will notice that this full skirt is in fact a delicate teacup, its porcelain edges showing cracks.

Arsenault’s illustrations are in muted but somber colors— sepias, blacks, grays, and pale blues broken only occasionally by a pop of red. The more readers study both Dickinson’s words and Arsenault’s pictures, the more deeply they will delve into the meaning and richness of the poems. This slender volume would be an effective way for a teacher or parent to introduce young readers to the power of poetry, and observe the ways the combination of words and visuals enhance each other and the reading experience. As the author of the notes on Arsenault suggests, her illustrations “enable Emily’s words to speak to the souls of a whole new generation—and they will make those already familiar with her work hear her as if for the very first time”.



***The New York Times* (Sara London)**

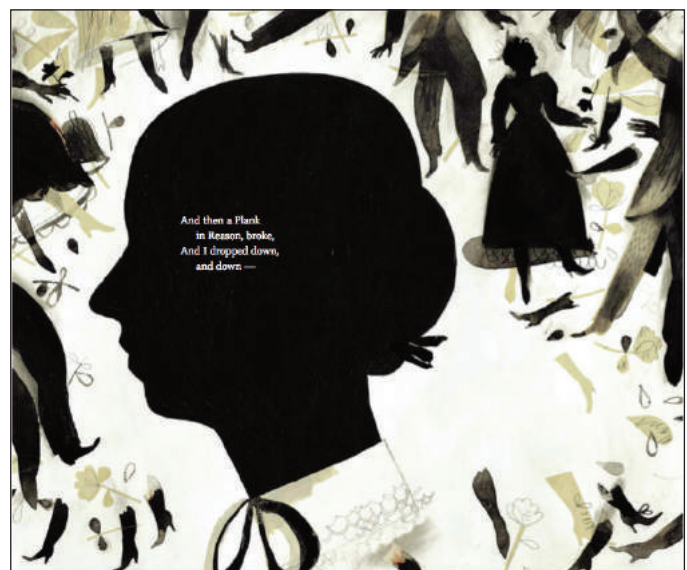
Emily Dickinson also employed metaphor, but she remained wedded to the music of metrics:

“‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers — / That perches in the soul.” *My Letter to the World and Other Poems*, from Kids Can Press’s valuable Visions in Poetry series, is an elegant introduction to the work of that mysterious belle of Amherst (who died when Williams was 2).

While rereading Dickinson’s riddle-like lines, I was struck by the power of Isabelle Arsenault’s haunting and expressive visual interpretations. Her delicate

color-washed drawings of a ghostlike Emily in her white dress, of doleful trees and marching ladies’ boots, depict a dreamlike 19th-century otherworld. Yet for all the muted tones (there’s plenty of black and gray), Arsenault avoids the dreary. Amid the shadows there’s lightness and humor to be found, and even Alice-in-Wonderland-like antics as Emily tumbles lovesick from the sky, wearing a porcelain-teacup skirt: “I cannot live with You — / It would be Life — / And Life is over there — / Behind the Shelf.”

Illumination opens this lovely selection (“There’s a certain Slant of light”) and closes it, too — Arsenault’s image of the perching bird that is “hope” glows in gold and orange hues. In between are Dickinson’s complex mortal musings, including “Because I could not stop for Death / He kindly stopped for me” and “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain.” So appealing are Dickinson’s short lines, rhymes and alliteration that music and meaning often emerge like small miracles: “How dreary — to be — Somebody! / How public — like a Frog — / To tell one’s name — the livelong June — / To an admiring Bog!”



Readers of all ages will indeed “judge tenderly” the poet who bares her soul here. Like “A River of Words,” this book ends with a biographical note, making it a helpful source for school projects. Emily’s “flurries of cryptic notes and letters” and the cache of nearly 1,800 poems found by her sister after her death (with only a handful published anonymously in her lifetime) are facts that enlarge one’s understanding of this “nobody” who was in fact a very significant “somebody.”

For many people, the leap to reading poetry can be more than a little daunting, which makes it especially important to begin when we’re young and unafraid. These exquisite books should prompt a running start.

## **Awards & Accolades**

*Best Books for Kids & Teens* selection, Canadian Children’s Book Centre  
Children’s Choices, Children’s Book Council and International Reading Association

### **Shortlisted for:**

Governor General’s Literary Award for Illustration, Canada Council for the Arts

## **Foreign Rights & Translations**

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque  
North America (English): Kids Can Press  
Spain: Libros Del Zorro Rojo



# Migrant (2011)

## Reviews

### **School Library Journal (Maggie Chase)**



This beautifully written story tells of a girl who belongs to a group of Mennonites who moved to Mexico in the 1920s, but still migrate to Canada annually to labor in the fields. Anna wishes she could stay in one place, to “be like a tree with roots sunk deeply into the earth” so that she could have stability and see the seasons change. Instead, readers get a glimpse into the child’s musings as she compares her family to migrating geese, butterflies, or bees. The artist’s mixed-media renditions of Anna imagining herself as a rabbit or her siblings as kittens and puppies are priceless. Even the geese wear tiny kerchiefs and hats as they soar through the air. There is a sense of childlike whimsy as well as deep longing conveyed through the illustrations, while the language of the text is rich with similes and descriptive words. Background information about this sect of Mennonites and migrant workers in general appears at the back of the book.

### **Brainpickings (Maria Popova)**

Having spent my entire adult life as an immigrant, with all the relocations, bureaucracies, and social strain implied, I have tremendous respect for any effort to capture the complexities of the immigrant experience, its joys and its struggles, without robbing it of dimension. So I was instantly enamored with *Migrant* — a gem of a picture-book by Canadian writer Maxine Trottier and illustrator Isabelle Arsenault, the artist who also gave us the wonderful *Jane, the Fox & Me*, a graphic novel inspired by Charlotte Brönte, and *Virginia Woolf*, a picture-book reimagining of Virginia Woolf’s childhood with her sister Vanessa.

*Migrant* tells the story of Anna, the youngest child in a large family of German-speaking Mennonites from Mexico, who venture to Canada to work as fruit and vegetable harvest laborers each spring. As Trottier points out in the afterword, they are part of a long tradition of people from all around the world, who have come to North America seeking not only a livelihood but also freedom, opportunity, a new beginning.

Arsenault’s tender illustrations bring a soft acceptance to Anna’s conflicting feelings — optimism and wistfulness, isolation and togetherness — feelings, I imagine, common to the immigrant experience and present in varying proportions in the heart of every nomad since the dawn of humanity.

Ripe with metaphor, Trottier’s beautiful, rhythmic narrative traces Anna’s imaginative interpretations of her reality. Too young to labor, the girl sees the rest of her family as a hive of worker bees.

When her parents’ backs are bent under the hot sun, when her older brothers and sisters dip and rise, dip and rise over the vegetables,



that is when all of them are bees. As they move into yet another empty house near the field, she imagines herself as a jack rabbit living in an abandoned burrow. (The scene, as Arsenault portrays it — Anna with her giant rabbit ears, surrounded by teacups — has a decided Alice in Wonderland feel, perhaps a subtle, intentional reflection of the strangeness and surreality a migrant invariably experiences in a foreign land.)

At night, Anna curls up with her sister as they sleep like a litter of kittens, while their brothers burrow together like puppies in the other room. Unable to understand the locals when the family shops for groceries “at the cheap store,” she hears their unfamiliar language as “a thousand crickets all singing a different song.” The family, with its annual journey from Mexico to Canada and back, becomes a flock of migratory geese.

A sweet and curious little girl, Anna wonders what a life of stability might be like — a life where she has her own bed and her own bicycle, where she watches the seasons come and go, rather than coming and going with them.

It is ultimately a tale at once hopeful and harrowing — a poignant catalyst for compassion, in reminding us how so many people live, and a testament, in Anna’s flights of the imagination, to Jeanette Winterson’s assertion that we tell ourselves stories in order to survive.

But fall is here, and the geese are flying away. And with them Anna goes, like a monarch, like a robin, like a feather in the wind!

## Awards & Accolades

Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator’s Award, Honour Book, Canadian Library Association

American Library Association’s Notable Children’s Books

*Best Books for Kids & Teens* selection, Canadian Children’s Book Centre

Notable Books for a Global Society Book Award

*The New York Times* Best Illustrated 2011

USBBY Outstanding International Book

### Shortlisted for:

Governor General’s Literary Award for Illustration, Canada Council for the Arts

Annual ReadBoston Best Read Aloud Book Award

Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children’s Book Award

“The words and images could stand alone as feats of artistic excellence. Together, they form a package that should become a staple for kids learning about Canada’s diverse population.”

*Quill & Quire*, STARRED REVIEW

## Foreign Rights & Translations

Japan: Nishimura Co., Ltd.

Korea: Sanha Publishing Co.

North America (English): Groundwood Books



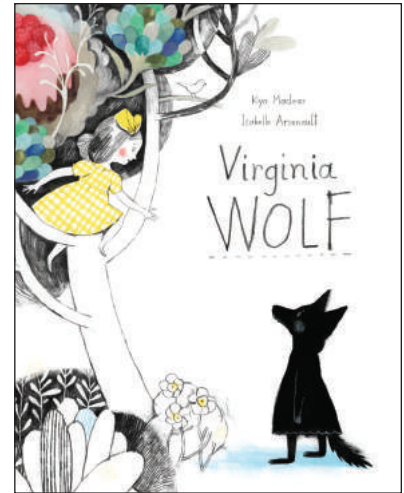
# Virginia Wolf (2012)

## Reviews

### ***The New York Times* (Pamela Paul)**

Operating on a much deeper and darker level, *Virginia Wolf*, an ambitious story about girlish blues, sisterly differences and the healing power of art, will do wonders for Woolf-besotted former English majors. But the story, about Virginia and her sister, Vanessa, who paints a fantastical world called Bloomsberry, will work equally well for children who hardly know the difference between the United States and the United Kingdom.

Kyo Maclear, a Canadian author, tells the story from Vanessa's perspective. "One day my sister Virginia woke up feeling wolfish," she notes. "She made wolf sounds and did strange things." What follows are Virginia's endless complaints and Vanessa's efforts to cheer and assuage her. "The whole house sank. Up became down. Bright became dim," is how Vanessa describes an imagined episode from Woolf's depressed youth.



Isabelle Arsenault, who won a *Times* Best Illustrated Award last year for her work on *Migrant*, by Maxine Trottier, imaginatively and deliciously depicts a child's inner world by altering her outward appearance. Here, Virginia is seen in bed with wolf's ears peeking out against the pillowcase. Her dark mood is shown in a stream of silhouetted girlish paraphernalia — upended teddy bears, books, a stool and flowers — strewn across a blue page along with topsy-turvy wolf-girl Virginia.

And then, gloriously, Virginia's dream world of "Bloomsberry" — "a perfect place" with "frosted cakes and beautiful flowers and excellent trees to climb and absolutely no doldrums" — appears as a cornucopia of delicate swirls and imagined treats that emerge from the wolf girl's heart.

The story blooms in full color when Vanessa decides to paint this Bloomsberry retreat and the two girls enter that artistic realm. Virginia tells stories. "The whole house lifted," Vanessa says. "Gloom became glad." And the figure of Virginia finally emerges from her dark silhouette, her wolf ears transformed into a pretty blue bowtie atop her head.



## ***The Horn Book Magazine* (Leonard S. Marcus)**

... “Here’s a world to imagine that is not quite the one you already know.”

Kyo Maclear’s *Virginia Wolf*, with illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault, takes the latter message and runs with it to brilliant effect. For little Virginia, to wake up “feeling wolfish” means to start the day in a black-on-white mood of unrelieved irritability and gloom—an overpowering emotional state that Arsenault represents in accomplished, mostly monochrome drawings, shaped smudges, silhouettes, and distended, off-kilter hand-lettering. All children sometimes feel this way, of course, but not all are lucky enough to have a sister (also the buoyant narrator here) whose patience, love, and raw talent with a paintbrush prove, in the end, to be more than enough to lift the unhappy girl out of her dark funk and back to the place where emotions range as widely as the color spectrum. Where are the ‘Wild Things’ in contemporary picture books? This wise and daringly imagined book is one place to look for them.

### **Awards & Accolades**

Best Bets, Picture Books, Ontario Library Association

*Best Books for Kids & Teens* starred selection, Canadian Children’s Book Centre

Books of the Year, *Quill & Quire*

CCBC Choices, Cooperative Children’s Book Center, Commended

Digital Book Award, Best eBook – Fixed Format/Enhanced: Children, Digital Book World Conference

Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award, IBBY Canada

Governor General’s Literary Award for Illustration, Canada Council for the Arts

IBBY Honour List – Illustration

USBBY Outstanding International Book

White Raven Award, International Youth Library

#### **Shortlisted for:**

Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator’s Award, Canadian Library Association

Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award

Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children’s Book Award

TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award

### **Foreign Rights & Translations**

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque

Brazil (Portuguese): Grupo SM Brasil

Chinese (Complex): WordField Publishing Co.

Chinese (Simplified): Guangxi Normal University Press Co. Ltd.

Dutch: Uitgeverij De Eenhoorn

Italian: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A.

Japanese: Kijiora Publishing Inc.

Korean: Sanha Publishing Co.

North America (English): Kids Can Press

Persian: Fatemi Publishing Co.

Slovenia: ZALA, Založništvo in izobraževanje

Spanish: Ediciones Jaguar

Spanish (ePub): La Bestia Equilatera SRL

United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand: Book Island Limited



# Jane, le renard & moi (2012)

## Reviews of English Translation *Jane, the fox & me*

### *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*



Combining picture-book size and style with graphic-novel narrative sensibility, this elegant Canadian import chronicles the experiences of H el ene, a sensitive junior-high outcast shunned and bullied by girls who were once her friends. She takes refuge in her reading of *Jane Eyre*, hoping that she, like Jane, can emerge out of difficult circumstances into a slender, wise woman whom people admire. For now, though, the mean girls tease her for being fat, a judgment that is belied by both the illustrations as well as by her doctor in the end, but one that she takes to heart as she looks in the mirror and tries on bathing suits for the class camping trip. The camping trip lives up to all of her fears at first, as she bunks with the other social outcasts and gets tormented by the mean girls, but two nice things do happen: she has a transformative encounter with a fox, and a new girl named

G eraldine rejects the mean girls and becomes her friend. H el ene's emotional tangle is given poignant expression through Arsenault's pitch-perfect mixed-media art; thin pencil-lined figures picked out against smudgy neutral grays and muted sepia tones highlight both the sharp-edged sources and limned echoes of H el ene's everyday sadness, while the depictions of her imagined scenes from *Jane Eyre* are cleaner and more colorful, bringing in reds and greens, and even on occasion exploding into luminous watercolor landscapes. The contrast is striking and sets up the almost mystical tone of the encounter with the fox, who stands out in the red previously reserved for H el ene's imaginary connection with Jane. The gradual emergence, accompanied by a progressively friendlier font style, into the full-color bloom of the final spread, assures readers that H el ene's inner and outer worlds have been reconciled into a happier and more hopeful place. H el ene's story is sweetly comforting and compelling on its own merits, and, as with Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*, the form in which it is presented also has value for those interested in analyzing and understanding the full aesthetic potential of the graphic-novel format in storytelling.

### ***The Guardian* (Rachel Cooke)**

Strictly speaking, *Jane, the Fox & Me* is intended for younger readers: it's published by the ever-brilliant Walker Books, home of Anthony Horowitz and Patrick Ness. However, this is a graphic novel so well drawn and beautifully told, I'm certain it will speak to adults, too – especially if you've only to think of your school days for your stomach to flip over. It's a collaboration between Quebec playwright Fanny Britt and award-winning illustrator Isabelle Arsenault, and I found it painfully evocative, the years dissolving almost as fast as I could turn its pages.

We are in Canada in the 1980s (or so I'm guessing: the boys in the book like to listen to records by the Police while eating copious amounts of liquorice). At school in Quebec, Helene finds herself an outcast. Her enemies, a regular bunch of mean girls, taunt her in the playground and on the bus home, and





write spiteful comments about her weight on the lavatory walls. Each day is a test. How to look nonchalant when your heart is racing? How to move with any confidence at all when you are convinced your backside is huge?

Helene won't tell her mother about her problems; she would only worry. Instead, she takes refuge in the pages of *Jane Eyre*, a novel whose heroine grows up to be both clever and slender in spite of her miserable start in life. Arsenault captures the sense of solace Helene finds in this book by using colour – she favours red, turquoise and a lush green – only when our heroine has her nose in it; the rest of the time, the world is rendered in shades of grey and brown.

Helene is sent to camp, and things can only get worse. She finds herself in a tent with the other unpopular girls: it's miles from the main cabin, and moving from one to the other is “like changing countries”. But then... hope. Sitting outside to read, Helene spies a fox. It has strikingly kind eyes, and though it disappears into the night, it is soon followed by Geraldine, newly exiled from the cool girls' tent (it seems she disliked their particular brand of group justice, and had to pay the price).



Geraldine has a remarkable effect on Helene and the other outcasts. Garrulous and open-hearted, she's able to bond with them, with the result that they're at last able to bond with each other (before, they were separated by an awkwardness born of knowing they were touched with the same contagion). On Helene's return to Quebec, the attentive reader will now notice the odd blaze of colour in the monochrome landscape and, sure enough, the book ends with an epiphany, the paralysing beam of the bullies' searchlight having at last moved on. “You'll see, the story ends well,” she tells Geraldine, pressing *Jane Eyre* on her new friend – a baton now, as well as a shield.



## Awards & Accolades

Angoulême – Prix jeunesse  
Governor General's Literary Award for Illustration,  
Canada Council of the Arts  
Grand Prix Lux for Illustration  
Joe Shuster Award – Outstanding Artist  
Prix Réal-Fillion

### Shortlisted for:

Pépites 2013 du Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse de Montreuil – Pré-selection  
Prix du livre jeunesse des Bibliothèques de Montréal  
Prix TD de littérature canadienne pour l'enfance et la jeunesse  
English translation: *Jane, the fox & me*  
Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Books of the Year  
Best American Comics  
Best Bets 2014, Ontario Library Association  
*Best Books for Kids & Teens* starred selection, Canadian Children's Book Centre  
*The Globe and Mail* Best Books 2013

IBBY Honour List – French to English translation

Libris Award for Young Readers Book of the Year, Retail Council of Canada

New York Public Library Books for Reading and Sharing

*The New York Times* Best Illustrated Books 2013

Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Great Graphic Novels for Teens

**Shortlisted for:**

Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator’s Award, Canadian Library Association

Arkansas Teen Book Award

Eisner Award for Best Publication for Kids

Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children’s Book Award

Rocky Mountain Book Award (Alberta)

“Hélène’s emotional tangle is given poignant expression through Arsenault’s pitch-perfect mixed-media art...[Her] story is sweetly comforting and compelling.”

— *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, STARRED REVIEW

“Readers will be delighted to see Helene’s world change as she grows up, learning to ignore the mean girls and realizing that, like Jane, she is worthy of friendship and love.”

— *School Library Journal*, STARRED REVIEW

## Foreign Rights & Translations

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque

China (Chinese Simplified): Beijing Total Vision Culture Spread Co.

Germany: Reprodukt

Holland: Reprodukt

Italy: Mondadori Editore

Japan: Nishimura Co.

Korea: Bookbean Publishing

North America (English): Groundwood Books

Poland: Kultura Gniewu

Portugual: WMF Martins Fontes

Russia: Albus Corvus Publishing House

Spain: Salamandra

Sweden: Sanatorium Forlag

United Kingdom: Walker Books



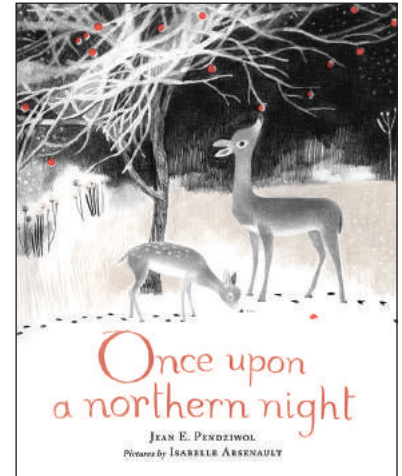
# Once Upon a Northern Night (2013)

## Reviews

### ***The New York Times* (Sarah Harrison Smith)**

What would it be like to stay in one place — to have your own bed, to ride your own bicycle?” a little girl named Anna wonders in Maxine Trottier’s 2011 picture book, *Migrant*. “Now that would be something.” Anna’s parents, who are migrant workers, move from one temporary home to another, and Anna imagines herself as a rabbit, living in abandoned burrows, or a bee, flitting from flower to flower. She is effectively homeless, and longs to live a settled life, “like a tree with roots sunk deeply into the earth.”

Home is also at the heart of two new picture books, *This Is Our House*, written and illustrated by Hyewon Yum, and *Once Upon a Northern Night*, written by Jean E. Pendziwol and illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault (whose artwork for Trottier’s *Migrant* earned a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Award). . . .



If family is central to Yum’s sense of home, Pendziwol and Arsenault enlarge that sense of a precious place to encompass a natural setting. *Once Upon a Northern Night* is spoken in a voice that could be that of an artist, a parent or even a deity. While a fair-haired boy sleeps “wrapped in a downy blanket,” the voice describes a scene in which wild animals roam across snowy fields as the northern lights play across the sky. Of the lights, the narrator says, “I tried to capture them but they were much too nimble, and only their rhythm reached you, deep in slumber, rising and falling with each sweet peaceful breath.”



Arsenault’s nighttime landscapes, created with gouache, ink, pencil and watercolor, add dramatic emphasis to the text; the wings of an owl with bright yellow and black eyes can scarcely fit on two pages; the russet tail and hind legs of a fox are lit by the moon while the rest of his body can be seen only faintly, in the shadows. Black and white dominate with occasional flashes of color — red apples on the bare branches of a tree, spiky green pine needles. The boy’s house appears only twice, but the overwhelming sense of the home is as a secure haven from which to view, or imagine, a mysterious and beautiful world. Older children may resist the slight sentimentality of Pendziwol’s text, but on a dark night a younger child is likely to revel in this book’s mixture of magic, wildlife and deep comfort.

### ***Quill and Quire* (Sarah Sorenson)**

A parent’s vision of a wintry Northern idyll leaps beautifully to life in this collaboration by author Jean E. Pendziwol and illustrator Isabelle Arsenault.

As a young child sleeps snugly inside the comfort of a warm farmhouse, the magic of a winter night takes hold outside. Animals awaken, snow swirls, and winds whisper. This is the nostalgic season of yesteryear.

Pendziwol draws inspiration from the landscape and geography of Northern Ontario, and her affection for this region shows clearly in her writing. Older readers will find themselves entranced by the care and beauty in Pendziwol's poetic narration, while those at the younger end of the scale will walk away with an expanded vocabulary. Snow isn't just "snow," it is "sparkling specks of white;" a "downy blanket;" a "milky-white bowl;" "vanilla ice cream;" "diamonds on branches." This aspect of the book offers opportunities for discussions about language and metaphor.

Pendziwol's aptitude for creating the perfect image through carefully crafted phrasing (reminiscent in tone and cadence of Nancy Tillman's 2006 classic, *On the Night You Were Born*) finds a fitting complement in Arsenault's richly layered scenes composed of seemingly simple elements. The softened edges and muted colours evoke feelings of warmth and peace, both befitting a gentle country snowfall. Tones of grey, white, taupe, and blue dominate, with occasional splashes of colour that brighten the images and add an element of surprise. The fox, in particular, makes a delightfully vibrant entrance onto the page.

*Once Upon a Northern Night* offers an enchanting interplay of text and illustration that grows richer with each turn of the page, and seems destined to join the ranks of winter-themed classics to be reached for year after year.

## Awards & Accolades

Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Books of the Year  
Books of the Year, *Quill & Quire*  
Toronto Public Library's First and Best 2013

### Shortlisted for:

Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award, Canadian Library Association  
Governor General's Literary Award for Text, Canada Council of the Arts  
Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award  
TD Canadian Children's Literature Award



"A beautiful, lyrical celebration of northern light and night."

— *Kirkus Reviews*, STARRED REVIEW

"A reverent ode to the magic and wonder of an icy winter night."

— *Publishers Weekly*, STARRED REVIEW

"This is a lovely wintry bedtime story, best for sharing one-on-one."

— *School Library Journal*, STARRED REVIEW

"A sweet and lovely tale of the magic of waking up to a world transformed by winter."

— *Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

## Foreign Rights & Translations

Canada (French): Éditions Scholastic  
France: Éditions Magnard Jeunesse  
Germany: Verlag Freies Geistesleben  
Korea: Daekyo Co., Ltd.

North America (English): Groundwood Books  
Spain: Ediciones SM  
United Kingdom: Walker Books

# On Isabelle Arsenault

## *Dickinson and the Visual Arts*

### *Emily and Isabelle: Beyond Time*

#### **Maryanne Garbowsky, *International Society Bulletin*, 2009**

Although Emily Dickinson's and Isabelle Arsenault's lives are worlds apart, each born in dramatically different centuries and pursuing different lifestyles, Ms. Arsenault was able to bridge the time gap between them in her sensitive and evocative illustrations for *My Letter to the World and Other Poems*, a 2008 publication of Kids Can Press.

"I wanted to actualize her vision to show that these poems from the past were still accurate." To achieve that end, Ms. Arsenault read *The World of Emily Dickinson* by Polly Longworth to gain some background on the poet and was inspired by it. "I read the book that was more of a visual biography which I found even more appropriate for me. I used it as a reference all through the creative process." One striking example was "the black cut-out silhouettes" which "inspired" her for "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain." These black figures become the images of the "Mourners" in the poem "treading" "to and fro."

Challenged by the words of Dickinson, Ms. Arsenault, French Canadian by birth, "read them over and over again to get a glimpse of their possible meaning. Poetry even in my own language can be hard to understand. But I love the wide range of interpretation it can suggest."

When she had steeped herself in the poetry, she and her editor, Tara Walker, began to select the poems to be used in the book. "She sent me a dozen of the poems" . . . but not one of them touched her. Thus she was able to go through the poems herself and "choose the ones I preferred, that inspired me the most."

Seven were chosen for the collection: these were the ones "that made sense" to her. "At first, they provoked pictures/scenes in my head . . . I wanted to give a modern tone to the book so the poems selected had to inspire me in that way." One of the seven, "I cannot live with You—," the artist discovered on her own and was "immediately . . . attracted to" it. Of all the illustrations, this one is a popular favorite. The teacup mentioned in the poem ("Our Life—His Porcelain / Like a Cup—") is used as the bottom half of Dickinson's white dress. The illustration opposite the poem's beginning lines shows a woman—Emily—in her familiar white dress, the bottom half of which is an upside down cup with cracks starting at the hem. On the next page, Dickinson tumbles backwards with the cup turning right side up so that red tea spills from it. The last illustration accompanying this poem depicts a profile of Dickinson. The upside down cup that is the bottom of the dress is reflected right side up against a gray background. The colorful pattern at the dress' hem connects the two cups creating an ovoid form. The pattern, a delicate leaf motif, provides the only color in this otherwise black-and-white portrait of "Despair." Arsenault deliberately chose the "black, austere" palette because "the poems inspired" it. But she also adds color or what she calls "sparks of light" to suggest the poet's "creativity amid a world of dark dresses."

Reversal is a technique the artist uses in her illustrations for this book. For instance, one striking example is in the poem "Because I could not stop for Death—." In this adroit illustration, we see an upside down house next to an upside down tree. Here the house is black, a void, an emptiness like a grave dug into the ground, but on the following page facing the last quatrain the house reappears, this time right side up and in white. Next to it is a tree,

not bare branches, but a right side up budding and blossoming tree. In the house is a door, and a woman dressed in white emerges into eternity upright and composed, a fitting conclusion to a trip to immortality.

These reversals and upside down images were carefully designed by the poet to reflect “the double meaning” in the poems. “Sometimes you think you get an idea, but at the end, you’re surprised to see it is the exact opposite.”

The delicate beauty of the illustrations begins immediately upon opening the book. In the frontispiece behind a translucent parchment paper bearing the words to Dickinson’s “Letter to the World,” a latticed scroll of vines divides the page in half. When we follow these lines, they lead us to the left side of the page to the poet shown in profile in her second story bedroom. She is writing, holding a pen from which this design grows. As she writes, the pen transforms into a living vine that scrolls down the right-hand side of the page, continues on the entire next page, and even extends onto the title page. These plantlike designs reflect the poet’s lifelong interest in botany. The artist, aware of the poet’s fascination with the subject, admits her own “taste for organic patterns, . . . a recurrent element in my work.”

Ms. Arsenault chose her medium for the book carefully, using “black ink . . . to echo Emily’s own medium as a writer.” She likes its “austere feel” which the artist found “appropriate.” She also experimented with “collage” using “old handwritten notes on paper” which she found in an antique store to refer to Dickinson’s “pieced together manuscript books.”

Although the publisher’s target audience is young people—10 years and up—it is a book for all ages. Not only are the seven poems favorites of all Dickinson readers, but they are interpreted so unforgettably and inventively that lovers of Dickinson’s poetry will want to have this book as part of their own personal library.

The last poem, “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers—”, was deliberately chosen to be the final poem in the collection. Since the “selection was a bit dark...I thought a nice ending to finish with was ‘Hope’.” The editor agreed with the order I suggested and was also convinced that ‘Hope’ had to be the last one.” It is a triumphant ending, the illustrations being the most colorful in the book. So lovely, in fact, is the poem’s first illustration that it was chosen for the cover and back of the book. This image portrays the poet with a bird red in color perched on the poet’s shoulder. The red of the bird’s plumage is repeated in the red flush high on the poet’s cheek. As the poem continues “And sweetest—in the Gale—is heard—” the bird is shown in full flight, its wings extended and in full color—red, yellow and white against a black and stormy sky. Carrying a flower in its beak, the bird brings hope to those in need. Below, a frieze of swirling letters excitedly erupts, echoing the hope that Dickinson’s words bring to those caught “in the Gale.”

Dickinson’s “letters” have left a legacy, which Ms. Arsenault remarkably reinterprets in her unique visual imagery. Like the poet, the artist has sought and achieved a common goal—to bring to a new generation a world where word and image working together stir and provoke readers’ imaginations beyond time and ordinary life.



## ***Louis parmi les spectres: d'innocence et de lucidité***

**Caroline Décoste, Voir, 2016**

*Il y a eu Hélène, qui a ému des milliers de lecteurs à travers le monde. Maintenant, il y a Louis, habité par toutes sortes de fantômes. Fanny Britt et Isabelle Arsenault reviennent avec Louis parmi les spectres, un deuxième album inclassable aussi beau que troublant.*

L'immense succès de *Jane, le renard & moi*, paru il y a quatre ans et raflant prix après prix, a autant surpris l'auteure et l'illustratrice qu'il leur a mis de la pression. «C'est plus difficile la deuxième fois: *Jane* a tellement suscité de réactions, a fait le tour du monde... Y a une partie de moi qui ne voulait pas décevoir», confie Fanny Britt. «Je voulais donc pas répéter une recette!» Même crainte de la collaboration à numéros pour l'illustratrice Isabelle Arsenault: «Ce n'était pas possible de faire abstraction du fait qu'on avait déjà collaboré, mais il ne fallait pas refaire la recette. Il fallait simplement reproduire le contexte qui nous a permis de créer une œuvre librement, proche de nous.»



Ainsi, l'album *Louis parmi les spectres* est né, comme *Jane*, en deux temps: d'abord, le texte de Fanny, puis le dessin d'Isabelle. «On a été plus en contact que pour la première collaboration: on a échangé plus d'opinions, discuté de ce qu'on avait en tête», explique l'illustratrice. «On savait qu'on voulait un univers orienté vers un personnage garçon, étant nous-mêmes mamans de garçons. À partir de là, Fanny est partie de son côté et a écrit l'histoire.»

Cette histoire, c'est celle de Louis, flottant entre l'enfance et l'adolescence. Il y a son père qui pleure «surtout, d'abord, à cause du vin». Sa mère, dont le sarcasme est la spécialité. Il y a Billie, celle qui illumine la vie de Louis, et Truffe, le petit frère pas aussi naïf qu'il en a l'air. *Louis parmi les spectres* est paradoxalement plus sombre et plus lumineux que l'album précédent. Les non-dits évoqués par le dessin d'Isabelle Arsenault frappent autant que les formules simples et touchantes de Fanny Britt: «Au matin, aucune trace de mon père, sauf dans les yeux rougis de ma mère.»

«J'avais besoin de laisser émerger une histoire que je trouvais essentielle. J'ai pris du temps avant d'assumer où je voulais aller avec ça», raconte l'auteure. «Il y avait une partie de moi qui se sentait à l'aise d'écrire des silences, des moments où je n'avais pas besoin de faire appel aux mots pour déployer le sens de ce que je voulais écrire, car je savais que la sensibilité d'Isabelle allait entrer en scène. Ce n'était pas la première fois que je travaillais avec un illustrateur, mais l'expérience était plus profonde avec Isabelle.» Alors que Fanny laisse son texte respirer, Isabelle prend le relais, à la manière d'un réalisateur. «Je me sens comme au cinéma: dans ma tête, je vois le livre comme un film, on dirait que les personnages existent! Je sens dans la phrase un temps d'arrêt ou un moment à accélérer. J'essaie de rythmer ça pour donner un autre point de vue, une autre perspective au récit.»



Pour dessiner les personnages de Louis et de son frère Truffe, Isabelle s'est inspirée des enfants de Fanny, ce qui a profondément ému l'écrivaine. «Pour moi, c'est un privilège d'avoir ces traces-là. Il y a quelque chose dans le type d'illustration d'Isabelle qui capte l'âme de façon différente

d'une photo ordinaire qu'on prend en famille. C'est comme consigné dans le temps.» Le style d'Isabelle, mêlant encre de couleur et crayon d'une façon très abouti mais où on voit aussi volontairement les traces d'esquisses, a quelque chose d'universel, «qui touche à la fragilité, à l'espoir et à la déception que tu peux lire dans les yeux des personnages, des émotions du *coming of age*, des moments de transition dans la vie, entre l'innocence et la lucidité». Louis sous le coup de crayon d'Isabelle, c'est le fils de Fanny, mais c'est aussi n'importe quel enfant de 11 ou 12 ans, «de tout temps et de partout».

Le style immédiatement reconnaissable d'Isabelle Arsenault a toutefois évolué entre la création de *Jane* et celle de *Louis*. «À la base, je suis plus à l'aise avec tout ce qui s'efface, ce qui se contrôle bien, car je retravaille beaucoup



mes images. Je ne me sens pas comme les bédésistes qui sont super bons pour dessiner à la va-vite un personnage à l'encre d'un seul coup!» avoue l'illustratrice. «Le deuxième livre s'est fait plus facilement, j'ai moins hésité, peut-être que mon dessin était plus contrôlé.» En plus des touches d'encre de couleur, qui servent à évoquer le passé de Louis (en vert) ou alors ses rêves et espoirs (en jaune), Isabelle travaille au crayon à mine graphite. Inspirée par le sujet de l'album, elle a intégré à ses dessins l'encre de Chine. «Comme c'est un livre qui parle du courage, je me suis identifiée à ce thème-là et je me suis mise dans une zone d'inconfort, de défi. L'encre, ça ne pardonne pas!»

À cheval entre le livre d'art, la bande dessinée/le roman graphique et l'album jeunesse, *Louis parmi les spectres* est inclassable. «Frédéric [Gauthier, de la Pastèque]

insistait beaucoup là-dessus: ne pense pas à ton public, il va se trouver si c'est sincère», relate Fanny Britt.

Pourtant, il y a toujours une petite angoisse... «Est-ce qu'il va tomber entre les craques du plancher si on n'arrive pas à lui trouver une place claire?» En même temps, cette fluidité du genre littéraire est le signe d'une œuvre aboutie et authentique. Pour Fanny, ça «traverse l'enfance, l'adolescence et l'âge adulte comme une espèce de vague», à l'image du sentiment qui l'habitait lorsqu'elle écrivait le récit. Pour Isabelle, le livre s'adresse à ceux qui aiment le dessin et la littérature: «les adultes, les enfants, filles comme garçons, peuvent y trouver leur compte, c'est ouvert et j'aime que ça soit comme ça. On veut communiquer une émotion, une pulsion qui nous porte à créer.» Si la nouvelle création Britt-Arsenault est un relatif casse-tête de libraire, il n'en est pas un de lecteur, car le talent et la sensibilité transcendent les étiquettes qu'on voudrait bien lui coller.

### ***Louis parmi les spectres: Innocence and Lucidity***

**Caroline Décoste, Voir, November 2016**

The huge success of *Jane, le renard & moi* published four years ago, which collected awards upon awards, really surprised the author and illustrator, so much so, that they felt some pressure when creating their second book together. “It’s more difficult the second time: *Jane* received so many accolades, it had travelled the world ... There’s a part of me that did not want to disappoint,” said Fanny Britt. “I did not want to repeat a recipe!” The same fear of formulaic repetition was echoed by illustrator Isabelle Arsenault: “It was not possible to ignore the fact that we had already collaborated, but we did not want to redo the same book. We simply had to reproduce the context that allowed us to create work freely, close to us.”





Like *Jane, renard & moi*, *Louis parmi les spectres* was created in two steps: initially with Fanny’s writing, then with Isabelle’s drawings. “We were in more contact than for the first collaboration – we exchanged more opinions, discussed what we had in mind,” explains the illustrator. “We knew we wanted a world oriented towards a boy character, being ourselves mothers of boys. From there, Fanny worked on her own and wrote the story.”

In this story Louis navigates between childhood and adolescence. We encounter his father who weeps “above all, because of his wine,” then we meet his mother who knows all too well how to be sarcastic. There is Billie, a girl who brings some light in Louis’ life, and Truffe, his young brother who is not as naive as he looks.

*Louis parmi les spectres* is paradoxically darker and lighter than the previous book. The untold narrative elements evoked by Isabelle Arsenault’s drawings are as striking as those simple and touching sentences of Fanny Britt’s: “In the morning, no trace of my father except in my mother’s reddened eyes.”

“I needed to let a story emerge that I thought was essential. I took time before assuming where I wanted to go with it,” says the author. “There was a part of me that felt comfortable writing silences, moments when I did not need to use words to develop meaning of what I wanted to write because I knew that Isabelle’s sensibility was about to set in. It was not the first time that I worked with an illustrator but the experience was deeper with Isabelle. “While Fanny let her text breathe, Isabelle took over, like a director. “I feel like in the movies – in my head, I see the book as a film, it looks as if the characters were alive! I feel a pause in a sentence or a time where momentum is needed. I try to give it some rhythm, to allow another point of view, another perspective to the story.”

To draw both characters of Louis and his brother Truffe, Isabelle was inspired by Fanny’s children, which deeply touched the writer. “For me, it’s a privilege to have these traces. There is something in Isabelle’s illustration style that captures the soul in a different way from an ordinary picture taken in a family setting. It is as if it was recorded in time.” Isabelle’s style – mixing coloured ink and pencil in a very accomplished way, but where one can also see preliminary sketches left intentionally – has something universal about it,” that touches fragility, hope and disappointment that can be read in the characters’ eyes. “It touches feelings related to coming of age, to transitional moments in life, between innocence and lucidity.” Louis, under Isabelle’s pencil, is Fanny’s son, but he can also be any 11- or 12-year-old child, “anytime and everywhere”.

Isabelle Arsenault’s instantly recognizable style has evolved, however, between the creation of *Jane, le renard & moi* and *Louis parmi les spectres*. “Basically, I’m more comfortable with everything that fades away, which can be well controlled, because I rework my illustrations a lot. I do not feel like cartoonists who are so good at drawing and inking a character very quickly all at once!” acknowledges the illustrator. “The second book



was easier to create, I hesitated less; perhaps my drawing was more controlled.” In addition to some touches of colour ink, which helped to evoke Louis’ past (in green) or his dreams and hopes (in yellow), Isabelle worked with graphite pencil. Inspired by the subject, she incorporated Chinese ink into her drawings. “Since it is a book that speaks of courage, I identified myself with this theme and I got into a zone of discomfort and challenge. Ink does not forgive!”

Being at the crossroads between art book, comic book, graphic novel and picture book, *Louis parmi les spectres* does not fit under one category. “Frédéric [Gauthier, publisher from La Pastèque] insisted on this a lot – do not think about your audience, it will find itself if the book is sincere,” recounts Fanny Britt. However, there is always a bit of anguish ... “Will the book fall between the cracks if we cannot find a clear spot?” Anyhow, the fluidity of this literary genre is the sign of an accomplished and authentic work. For Fanny, it “goes through childhood, adolescence and adulthood like a kind of wave,” in the image of the feeling that inhabited her when she wrote the story. For Isabelle, the book is for those who love drawing and literature – “adults, children, girls as well as boys, can find their interest, it is open and I like it to be like this. We want to communicate an emotion, an impulse that led us to create.” If the new creation Britt-Arsenault is a potential bookseller’s headache, it is not a problem for its readers, because talent and sensitivity transcend labels.

*Translation: Josiane Polidori*





## Complete Bibliography

2004

### *Le cœur de monsieur Gauguin*

Picture book

Text by Marie-Danielle Croteau, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Éditions les 400 coups: Montreal, Canada

2006

### *Pas sérieux*

Illustrated, adult

Text by Raymond Plante, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Éditions les 400 coups: Montreal, Canada

2008

### *My Letter to the World and Other Poems*

Poetry

Poems by Emily Dickenson, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Kids Can Press: Toronto, Canada

2010

### *La caja de los recuerdos*

Picture book

Text by Anna Castagnoli, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
OQO Editora: Galicia, Spain

### *Bonjour les hirondelles*

Picture book

Text by Hélène Suzzoni, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Éditions Casterman: Paris, France

### *Spork*

Picture book

Text by Kyo Maclear, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Kids Can Press: Toronto, Canada

2011

### *Migrant*

Picture book

Text by Maxine Trottier, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Groundwood Books: Toronto, Canada

2012

### *Virginia Wolf*

Picture book

Text by Kyo Maclear, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Kids Can Press: Toronto, Canada

### *Jane, le renard & moi*

Graphic novel

Text by Fanny Britt, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Éditions de la Pastèque: Montreal, Canada

2013

### *Once Upon a Northern Night*

Picture book

Text by Jean E. Pendziwol, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Groundwood Books: Toronto, Canada

2014

### *Alpha*

Alphabet book

Text and illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Éditions de la Pastèque: Montreal, Canada

2016

### *Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois*

Picture book

Text by Amy Novesky, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Abrams Books: New York, United States

### *You Belong Here*

Picture book

Text by M.H. Clark, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Compendium Books: Seattle, United States

### *Louis parmi les spectres*

Graphic novel

Text by Fanny Britt, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Éditions de la Pastèque: Montreal, Canada

2017

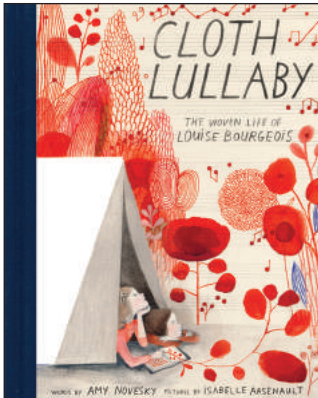
### *Colette's Lost Pet*

Picture book

Text and illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault  
Tundra Books: Toronto, Canada



## Other Awards & Accolades



### *Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois*

*Kirkus* Best Book of the Year 2016

Junior Library Guild selection

“With evocative, gorgeous illustrations and an inspirational story of an artist not often covered in children’s literature, this arresting volume is an excellent addition to nonfiction picture book collections, particularly those lacking titles about women artists.”

— *Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

“The evocative, hand-lettered text, peppered with quotations in red ink, provides an impressionistic portrait of the memories, colors, sounds, and images propelling Louise’s art. These motifs connect the imaginative ink, pencil, pastel, and watercolor illustrations, done in a palette of indigo, red, and gray. Bold, repetitive patterns of stylized flowers, woven crosshatches, spirals, giant spiders, and musical notes form the perfect background for the cloth lullaby Louise weaves for herself. Splendid visual and verbal introduction to little-known artist Louise Bourgeois.”

— *Kirkus*, STARRED REVIEW

Novesky sews together the many themes of Bourgeois’s art and life — weaving, restoration, maternity, domesticity, memory — into a spare yet lilting narrative. Arsenault taps into these themes in her illustrations, which combine ink, pencil, pastel, watercolor, and Photoshop to create gorgeous images as stylistically and compositionally varied as the tapestries Louise’s mother wove.

— *THE HORN BOOK*, STARRED REVIEW

## Spork

*Best Books for Kids & Teens* starred selection, Canadian Children’s Book Centre

Best Children’s Books of the Year, Bank Street Children’s Book Committee

IBBY Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities

Quebec’s Booksellers Award 2012

### Shortlisted:

Horace Mann Upstanders Book Award

Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award



## Other Foreign Rights & Translations

### *Alpha*

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque  
North America (English): Candlewick Press  
United Kingdom : Walker Books

### *Cloth Lullaby : The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois*

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque  
Japan: Nishimura Shoten  
Germany: Seemann Henschel  
Korea: Seedbook Co. Ltd  
North America (English): Abrams Books  
Spain (Spanish and Catalan): Impedimenta

### *La caja de los recuerdos*

Spanish & French: OQO Éditions

### *La cœur de monsieur Le Gauguin*

Canada (French World): Éditions les 400 coups  
North America (English): Tundra Books

### *Louis parmi les spectres*

Canada (French): Éditions de la Pastèque  
Italy: Mondadori Editore  
North America (English): Groundwood Books  
United Kingdom: Walker Books

### *Spork*

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque  
Korea: Neungyule Education, Inc.  
North America (English): Kids Can Press  
Persian: Fatemi Publishing Co.



