

SPEECH BIB 50- IBBY PRESIDENT

Friday, 4 September at 5pm:

Official opening ceremony of BIB 2015,

Opera House of the Slovak National Theatre

Dear Friends,

BIB celebrates its golden jubilee today. This means that IBBY and BIB have had a close partnership for 50 years: it is not that common anymore to remain faithful to each other for so long. 'Every child has to have the chance to read quality books with high literary and artistic standards', this is one of the common goals of both organisations. Devoting yourself to the same goal for fifty years; surely there has to be some love involved.

Since I now have the chance, I would like to express my gratitude to one of our legendary IBBY-personalities, Dusan Roll, for his part in the history of IBBY. Without his motivation, we would not be celebrating fifty years of BIB. 'If we can't go abroad, we bring abroad in our country' is one of his famous quotes and still applicable today. There will always be motivated people who want to perpetuate the objectives of IBBY and BIB. I would like to thank all here in Bratislava who continue to follow the legacy of Jella Lepman, in particular Peter Tvrdon the Director of Bibiana, Zuzana Jarošová BIB General Commissioner, Viera Anoškinová head of the BIB Secretariat and our EC member Timotea Vrablova current President of Slovak IBBY.

The sixties were a time of great importance to illustrators of children's and youth literature. Their role in creating quality books was recognised and they finally received the attention they deserved. The IBBY Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration has been awarded since 1966; since 1965 the German Youth Literature Prize has included a category for picture books; the American Boston Globe-Horn Book Award has included a category for picture books since its inauguration in 1967.

Why exactly was there a shift in appreciation for illustrators during those years? Did it have anything to do with the ascent of an independent youth movement? The liberation of the child? Or was it the innovative artists who laid down the foundations? Perhaps it was Maurice Sendak with his book *Where The Wild Things Are* in 1963, depicting a surreal and menacing world of make-believe creatures. In the mid-1960s a new kind of picture book

emerged in which the illustrations dominated the text. Eric Carle's bright, bold collages made from painted tissue paper debuted in 1967 with *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* And his book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) has become a preschool classic. The Swiss illustrator Alois Cariget received the first Andersen Award for Illustration in 1966. His picture books, in particular *Schellen-Ursli (A Bell for Ursli)*, have been published worldwide.

The second Andersen Award Winner for Illustration was the Czech illustrator Jiri Trnka in 1968. Trnka wanted to include the illustrations as an integral part of the book: pictures that had equal status to the text.

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

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

The picture book flourishes around the globe. It is ironic that the greatest danger to the original picture book is blandness. Junko Yokota postulated in her lecture at the recent regional IBBY-congress in Malaysia, that cultural identity is vanishing from children's literature. Big international publishers are producing bland one-size-fits-all children's and youth books because of the development of the ever-globalizing market.

Herein lies the necessity for organizations such as IBBY and BIB. We must present a front against the increasing commercialization of children's and youth literature. We must refuse to consider young readers as commercial products. We want to cherish them by giving them quality literature and illustrations. BIB and IBBY take children seriously. Not to earn money, but because only the best is good enough for children.

I thank you for your attention!

Wally De Doncker, 9 August, 2015