

ANNIVERSARY PUBLICATION



Astrid Lindgren
Memorial Award

2002-2022

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20 YEARS OF CELEBRATING
CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO
GREAT STORIES

Two decades gives us ample opportunity for reflection

Snuggled in the warm embrace of her bedclothes a child is being read to by a parent. The fabulous pictures on every page, the soft lull of the voice, and the repetition of a story told so many times before, comforts, reassures, sends her to sleep but also anchors cultural traditions that have lasted for thousands of years.

Sitting bolt upright in bed, a child listens to a tale of injustice, her anger rising. This story inspires, incites, planting a seed of righteous activism that will last a lifetime.

On a bus back from school and unable to tear herself away, a young reader is caught up in an adventure of someone just like her, but in another time, another place, another universe. The invitation to the imaginary will stay with her forever.

These stories, and of course many, many more, could help us define why the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award demands that ‘children have the right to great stories’. As we reflect on twenty years of highlighting and honouring some of the greatest achievements in children’s and young adult literature, we are constantly reminded not only of the significance of our past laureates but the daunting and fantastic task ahead of us. ALMA’s responsibility is to be a voice for the importance of children’s literature in an ever-changing world. Regardless of all the changes we have seen in the last twenty years, the significance of children’s literature remains a constant. In this

publication, distinguished past and present jury members have written a personal reflection on each of the authors, illustrators and reading promotion organisations who have been granted the award since its foundation.

The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award was created in 2002 by the Swedish government and with an annual prize of five million Swedish kronor, it is therefore the world's largest award for children's and young adult literature. Two decades gives us ample opportunity for reflection, to evaluate what we have achieved and to suggest where we need to adapt. It also reminds us of our responsibilities. This is no simple obligation, and every year the selection of the chosen laureate is a rigorous, careful and painstaking process. We are thankful for the hundreds of proposals that we receive from around the world from our nominating bodies. Without their nominations there would be no award, and each year we increase the number and worldwide spread of nominating bodies. The award is now supported by over 70 countries. ALMA is of course also thankful for the work of our expert jury.

The selection process takes at least a year, and the twelve jury members read and study the work of the candidates thoroughly. When you read their texts in this publication it is intriguing to imagine the hundreds of other nominees they have also considered over the years!

The world of children's books is changing. Twenty years ago, the digital space we now take for granted was only just emerging. The immediacy of global communication, the simplicity of distributing images and the development of exciting new media, have changed and will change this world. But the three small scenes with which I began point to another truth – that the significance of great stories will continue regardless!

Suzi Ersahin

Director Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

Children have the right to great stories

To lose yourself in a story is to find yourself in the grip of an irresistible power. A power that provokes thought, unlocks language and allows the imagination to roam free.

The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award was created 20 years ago by the Swedish government to promote every child's right to great stories. This global award is given annually to a person or an organisation for their outstanding contribution to children's and young adult literature. With a prize of five million Swedish kronor, it is the largest award of its kind. Above all else, it highlights the importance of reading – today and for future generations.

The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award aims to give young people around the world access to literature. If the award contributes to more books being translated into more languages, then more children will be able to discover literature that broadens their thoughts, imagination and ideas. In addition to honouring the memory of Astrid Lindgren, the award is therefore a way to contribute to a more democratic and open world.

It is administrated by the Swedish Arts Council.

Selecting the laureates

Each year, hundreds of candidates are nominated from around the world. The list of nominees is published each autumn and is a treasure trove for anyone who wants to find new literature from around the globe. The nominees include authors, illustrators, oral storytellers and others who work to promote reading among children and young people.

A 12-member jury has the challenging but enjoyable task of evaluating some of the world's most prominent candidates each year and selecting one laureate (or several). To identify the most interesting and creative nominees – and to help broaden perspectives – the jury invites nominations from nominating bodies around the world. The names of the candidates are always released in autumn, after which the jury begins its selection process. The announcement of the new laureate takes place the following spring.

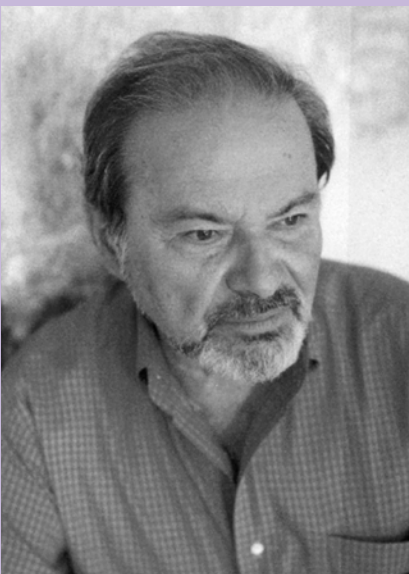
2003

Maurice Sendak

The jury's motivation

“Maurice Sendak is the modern picture book’s portal figure. He is unparalleled in developing the picture book’s unique possibilities of narrating – to the joy of constant new picture book illustrators. Furthermore, he is one of the most courageous researchers of the most secret recesses of childhood – to the delight of constant new readers.”

Illustration from **Where the Wild Things Are** by Maurice Sendak.
Copyright © 1963 by Maurice Sendak, copyright renewed 1991 by
Maurice Sendak. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers



The American author and illustrator Maurice Sendak (1928–2012) was born in Brooklyn, New York. In his books, he penetrated the most secret recesses of childhood. His breakthrough book, **Where the Wild Things Are** (1963), has been called the picture book of picture books. It has been translated into numerous languages and read by generations of children around the world.

Photo: John Dugdale

Maurice Sendak

By Katarina Eriksson Barajas

Like Astrid Lindgren herself, Maurice Sendak is steadfastly loyal to the child's mind and way of seeing the world. His stories succeed in speaking simultaneously to both children and adults. Of all Sendak's books, *Where the Wild Things Are* is the best known. Like a number of his stories, it takes place in a young boy's room at night, as the boy processes a psychological event within the world of dreams and fantasy. The key scene in *Where the Wild Things Are*, Max's conflict with his mother, is only described in the written text. Meanwhile, other elements, like the "wild rumpus" and the sea monster, are only portrayed in pictures. Max thinks his mother is being unfair. His classic journey away from home and back again has been interpreted as his way of psychologically compensating for his feeling of being wronged, using the free zone offered by imaginative play.

As Max's world expands,
the pictures take up more
and more of the page.

Where the Wild Things Are is one of my favourite books. It is a perfect book to read aloud to children. It is also an excellent book for teaching future educators about how, in picture books, text and image are interdependent and must work together to tell the story.

Because of its masterful interplay between text and image, *Where the Wild Things Are* is usually classified by scholars as a "genuine picture book," that is, one where neither words nor images reveal the full story.

Scholars have also drawn attention to the way *Where the Wild Things Are* uses pictures of different sizes and formats to advance the story. As Max's world expands, the pictures take up more and more of the page. When Max sets sail for the place of the wild things, he turns his back on the reader. At this moment, the accompanying illustration expands across the middle of the book and onto the facing page. This, too, is a way of illustrating Max's expanding world. The transformation he undergoes is portrayed through images that get bigger and bigger until they eventually reach the outer edges of the page. When Max reaches the wild things, the picture touches the left, right and top edges of the page; when he tames the wild things, it expands downwards as well. The book's climax, the wild rumpus, is portrayed in three double-page images. After that, the same process plays out in reverse. Gradually the images shrink and the white space expands. Meanwhile, the moon goes from half to full. This helps signal that Max's journey has been a long one. Maybe, too, it symbolises a shift from deficiency to wholeness and harmony. The fact that we can discover and ponder details like these in its playful images is, I believe, one reason why *Where the Wild Things Are* truly stands the test of time.

2003

Christine Nöstlinger

The jury's motivation

“Christine Nöstlinger is a reliably bad child-rearing influence of the same calibre as Astrid Lindgren. Her diversified and highly committed authorship is characterized by disrespectful humour, clear-sighted solemnity and inconspicuous warmth. She is a staunch supporter of children and those living on the margin of society.”

“Dear Parents,

Your dearest wish has now been granted.

We, the manufacturers, wish you every happiness, and hope you will be completely satisfied with your child.

May he always bring you joy, and fulfil the expectations you have of him and of our firm.

Our firm has done all in its power to provide you with a satisfactory, promising and good-natured child.

The rest is up to you!”

Christine Nöstlinger, **Conrad : the hilarious adventures of a factory-made child** (Andersen Press, 1976)



Christine Nöstlinger (1936–2018) grew up in Vienna, Austria. She was primarily a writer of children’s and young adult books, but she also worked as a television, radio and magazine journalist. She produced over 100 titles, from fantasy stories to realistic portrayals of everyday life to autobiographical works in which she reflected upon her own life. About 70 of her books have been translated to Swedish, most of them by Astrid Lindgren’s daughter, Karin Nyman.

Photo: Paul Schirnhofe

Christine Nöstlinger

By Janina Orlov

The other day I read a book that made me laugh more than I have in ages. It was a book about a very colourful lady named Mrs. Bartolotti, who loved to collect coupons and special offers. One day she receives a large package in the post. Inside the package is a tin, and inside the tin is a boy. The boy is seven years old, and his name is Conrad. Conrad's arrival turns life upside down for Mrs. Bartolotti and for her friend, the very proper pharmacist, Mr. Egon.

Conrad, you see, is a factory-made boy, produced to exacting standards and with a full range of pre-programmed behaviours. In every respect he is a model child, and he has a very advanced vocabulary. In fact, he thinks and talks more like a grown-up than a child. Yet he also plays with building blocks because that's what children do. Mrs. Bartolotti doesn't remember ordering Conrad. But maybe, she thinks, she just forgot. So she throws herself into her new role as a mother. How is a parent supposed to behave? How do you kiss your child, and when? What do children eat? So many questions. And what on earth will the neighbours think?

When the time comes for Conrad to start school, he announces that "after a night of careful deliberation", he has decided to go straight into third grade. Outside the school, Mrs Bartolotti suggests that when Conrad talks to the school board, he should sound "a bit more childlike". Conrad is perplexed. He asks, "Do I sound unchildlike? What is unchildlike?" Mrs. Bartolotti isn't sure. But she suspects most seven-year-olds speak more simply than Conrad because they know fewer words. "Which words?" he wonders.

Conrad's questions are justified. Despite his many pre-programmed abilities, the further we get into the story, the more he begins to appear as a punctiliously packaged blank slate: a prefab product rather than a real person in the making. The scene in front of the school thus represents a pivotal moment. When perfect Conrad comes up short, he begins to question the concept of a "child" and everything associated with it. From that point on, Conrad becomes a work in progress. At this point, too, the school (a factory of another kind) assumes a key role. At school, Conrad meets other children, who inevitably bully him. Luckily, he also has his friend Kitty. With help from Mrs. Bartolotti and Mr. Egon, Kitty succeeds in teaching Conrad how to be naughty. It's a good thing she does, because the factory has realised its shipping error and it wants Conrad back. But Conrad has now changed so much that he no longer meets the standards of their original client. He is permitted to stay with Mrs Bartolotti. Yet I can't help wondering – will disobedience really win the day? Is this a triumph of naughtiness, in the true spirit of modern children's literature? In fact, it is not. Christine Nöstlinger – the author of this marvellous book – knows better. In the end, she lets Mrs. Bartolotti and Mr. Egon say which Conrad they prefer: the well-behaved boy or the chaotic one.

Mrs Bartolotti prefers chaos. Mr Egon is for good behaviour. Nöstlinger gives Kitty the final word. And what Kitty says (more or less) is "We'll find out soon enough." It is an open-ended conclusion that leaves us with many questions to ponder. Among much else, Nöstlinger shows us that categories can be fluid – children can be virtuous or mischievous or both, while adults can sometimes be incredibly childish.

2004

Lygia Bojunga

The jury's motivation

“Lygia Bojunga dissolves the boundaries between fantasy and reality with all the exhilarating ease of a child at play. In her dramatic and word of mouth-style narratives the reader is always enabled to enter directly into the dreams and fantasies that her principal characters draw on for survival. In a deeply original way she fuses playfulness, poetic beauty and absurd humour with social critique, a love of freedom and a strong empathy with the vulnerable child.”

“I’m not sure if I was born like this or if I became like this because of my friend the painter, but when I look at something, the first thing I notice is the color. People, houses, books – it’s always the same. The first thing I look at is the color of their eyes, of the doors, and of the covers of the books; only then do I begin to see what the rest is like.”

Lygia Bojunga, *My friend the painter* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991)



Brazilian author Lygia Bojunga was born in 1932. She began her career as an actor in a theatre company that toured rural Brazil. She has written a number of works for the stage and has also worked in radio and television, experiences that are reflected in her books, which frequently display a keenly dramatic quality. Her writing fuses playfulness, poetic beauty and absurd humour with social critique, a love of freedom and a strong empathy with the vulnerable child.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Lygia Bojunga

By Lars H Gustafsson

It is the autumn of 2004, and I am sitting in my clinic in a school in Malmö. A teacher has asked me to speak with a girl who is feeling down. She is eleven years old, and the teacher is having a hard time reaching her.

It takes a while before the girl finally tells me what is bothering her. Her grandfather died by suicide a few days ago and no one can understand why. The two of them were very close. How could he do such a thing? And why didn't he say anything?

During my last years
as a school doctor,
I prescribed more books
than medications.

My thoughts go to a book that I read over the winter: *My Friend the Painter* by Lygia Bojunga. I discussed it at the time with my friends on the ALMA jury and it touched me deeply. Then in May, Bojunga received the 2004 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

Now here we sit in my clinic. The girl in front of me reminds me so much of the character in the book, Claudio, at least as I imagined him. Claudio's friend the painter also died by suicide. But Claudio found a way to navigate his grief with the help of the very tools the painter taught him to use – tools of the imagination.

I take out my prescription pad. "Maybe you think I'm going to prescribe you some pills," I say. "Actually, I'm going to prescribe you a book. Take this prescription, go to the library, and ask them for this book. Then read it, preferably with your mother. Come back and see me in a couple of weeks. Then I want to hear what you think."

Somewhat to my surprise, she does come back. "It's the best book I ever read," she says. We sit together for half an hour, talking about Claudio and the painter. A conversation that is equally about a girl and her grandfather. And a quiet, desperate mother. Because that's the way of good stories. They contain us all, and inside them we are all alive.

After the award ceremony in May 2004, I had the opportunity to talk a bit with Lygia Bojunga. "I write for people", she said, "and I know that many of my readers are children. That's good. Then I have reached someone." We agreed that children are people, not people-to-be.

I continued to give my patients books on prescription. During my last years as a school doctor, I prescribed more books than medications. Among my most prescribed books were three by Lygia Bojunga. *My Friend the Painter* was one. The other two were *Seis vezes Lucas* (Six Times Lucas) and *Corda bamba* (Slack Rope). What are they about? I think you should read them and see!

2005

Philip Pullman

The jury's motivation

“Philip Pullman is a master storyteller in a number of genres – from historical novels and fantasy to social realism and highly amusing parodies. With inventiveness, linguistic brilliance and psychological insight he creates and explores his own worlds without losing focus on here and now. Through his strong characters he stands firmly on the side of young people, ruthlessly questioning authority and proclaiming humanism and the power of love whilst maintaining an optimistic belief in the child even in the darkest of situations.”

“Lyra could feel Pantalaimon bristling with anxiety, though he made no sound. For herself, she was pleasantly excited. The visitor mentioned by the Master, Lord Asriel, was her uncle, a man whom she admired and feared greatly. He was said to be involved in high politics, in secret exploration, in distant warfare, and she never knew when he was going to appear. He was fierce: if he caught her in here she’d be severely punished, but she could put up with that.”

Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials. 1, Northern lights* (Scholastic, 1995)



The British author Philip Pullman was born in 1946 and began his career as a teacher before becoming a full-time writer. His works are rich and diverse and are equally appreciated by young and adult readers alike. Many know Pullman as the creator of the fantasy trilogy **His Dark Materials**. He is an active voice in public debate and a passionate advocate for children’s access to art and literature.

Photo: Tom Nicholson

Philip Pullman

By Agneta Edwards

I was just parking my car at the university when my mobile rang. Did I want to sit on a jury for a new literature award? Absolutely, I said, although the rain was pelting so hard on the roof of the car that I could hardly hear the details. I gathered, however, that it was an international award, and I was welcome to start thinking about potential recipients straight away. Eventually there would be external nominating bodies from all over the world, but this year, the time leading up to the first award ceremony was short. As I unlocked the lecture hall, my mind was racing. I couldn't think of a single name (except for one gentleman, long dead, who had invented entire languages as well as his own world to put them in).

At any rate, I know it was
love at first read.

But when my students entered the classroom and pulled out the week's reading assignment from their sodden backpacks, the answer came to me. On all the desks, alongside a book by J.R.R. Tolkien (he of the languages) and another by Astrid Lindgren (she had something to do with this award, I was sure, although quite what had been lost in the rain) lay various editions of *The Golden Compass*, the first book in the trilogy *His Dark Materials*.

In an instant, I knew who my nominee would be. I do not remember how I first came to the books of Philip Pullman. Probably I began with *I Was a Rat*, or maybe

Clockwork (or *All Wound Up*). At any rate, I know it was love at first read. Like most literature nerds, I love books about books and books with clever structures like Chinese boxes. I love, too, Pullman's dialogue with world literature: folk tales, *Faust*, *Don Quixote*, and not least Milton's *Paradise Lost*, of which *His Dark Materials* is a kind of reimagining.

Does that sound pretentious? Not in the least. Pullman is steadfastly loyal to his young readers. No matter the genre, first and foremost he always gives us a really good story. And a host of memorable characters, from superhero Spring-Heeled Jack to Sally Lockhart, the heroine of his Victorian-era mysteries. The greatest of them all, of course, is Lyra Silvertongue: bold, curious and just as good a liar – um, *storyteller* – as her creator. Lyra and her *dæmon* Pantalaimon, with their powerful bond, their constant companionship and their loyalty to one another, the testing of which nearly tears their souls apart.

Of all the gems in Pullman's bibliography, *His Dark Materials* shines the brightest. This complex, beautiful and sometimes cruel magnum opus about alternative worlds injected much-needed life into the fantasy genre. New readers can also come to the story in a splendid television series (released in 2019) that closely follows the books.

And it seems, fortunately for us, that Philip Pullman is not yet done with Lyra and her world. Like the golden compass, the alethiometer that always tells the truth, Pullman continues to build his narrative in layer upon layer, broadening and deepening his original tale in short stories and a new trilogy, *The Book of Dust*.

2005

Ryôji Arai

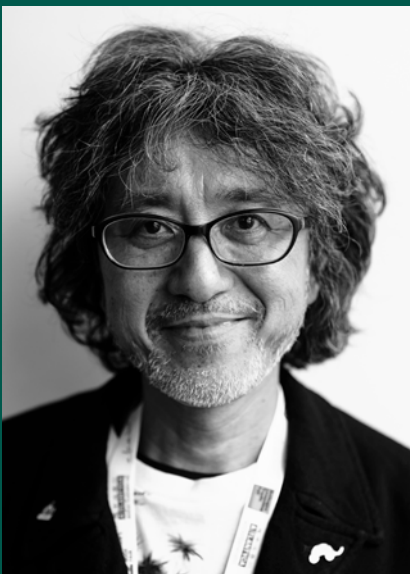
The jury's motivation

“Ryôji Arai is an illustrator with a style all of his own: bold, mischievous and unpredictable. His picture books glow with warmth, playful good humour and an audacious spontaneity that appeals to children and adults alike. In adventure after adventure, colour flows through his hands in an almost musical way. As a medium for conveying stories to children, his art is at once genuine and truly poetic, encouraging children to paint and to tell their own stories.”



Ryôji Arai, **När kommer bussen?**
(Alfabeta, 2006). Original title:
Basu ni notte

Ryôji Arai, **Sussa och Natti**
(Alfabeta, 2006). Original title:
Sûsû to Neruneru



Ryôji Arai is a picture book artist, born in Japan in 1956. His production of picture books is both large and varied – from small books for toddlers to nonsensical picture books to fairy tales and poetry. He has also worked with advertising, magazine illustration and theatre set design, and he brings the child's perspective to all these endeavours.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Ryôji Arai

By Ulla Rhedin

Just before he started work as the artistic director of the Yamagata Biennale in 2014, the Japanese picture book artist Ryôji Arai told an interviewer that he thought people usually experienced art in only one direction. But he wanted to make the door swing the other way: to have us “see and feel the picture” before processing the words that would inevitably lead us to “see with knowledge”. For the same reason, Arai prefers to work with and for children before they enter the world of school and words. “We must never forget that children are here and now, and all they want is to be entertained” – this is his credo.

Arai’s oeuvre is large, bold and diverse.

Arai likes to think of his picture books as windows to the world, and himself as a small locomotive, chugging through a beautiful countryside and picking up small stories from near and far. In this, he represents a side of Japanese culture that is light, sensuous and playful. Many of his early books tell stories of simple encounters between people or anthropomorphized animals or objects. The characters might take a short walk together, often with music in the background; or there might be a dance or a parade in a colourful city setting or a grand landscape in which volcanoes, forest wildernesses, seas, lakes, or rivers figure. Arai’s illustrations appeal to all five of our senses, and his

use of broken perspective and powerful diagonal compositions lends his stories velocity and rhythm, warmth and colour.

In parallel with the lyrical and colouristically fascinating picture books that won the hearts of the ALMA jury, Arai has also published numerous picture books, some in collaboration with others, in which his experience in advertising, animation and Japanese pop culture comes to the fore. It is most evident, perhaps in his comical pictures of people, which range from realistic portraits to stylised crazy figures in American cartoon style or in the spirit of Japanese robots, mascots or *kawaii*. We encounter giant heads with onion-top or Mickey-Mouse hair and Bambi eyes, perched atop delicate line bodies with club-shaped feet. As irony and subtext seem not to figure in Japanese culture, the figures impress us as being direct, nonsensical and genuinely naïve.

Arai’s oeuvre is large, bold and diverse. He will perhaps ultimately be remembered most for his exquisite illustrations of the work of Hiroshi Osada (1939–2015), one of Japan’s most beloved poets. To date Arai has produced three picture books with texts by Osada that are suitable for all ages. They are lush and painterly and each one focuses on a theme from nature: *mori/forest* (1999), *sori/sky* (2011), and *mizu/water* (2019).

In books such as these, Arai fills the space between people and art with art itself.

2006

Katherine Paterson

The jury's motivation

“Katherine Paterson is a brilliant psychologist who gets right under the skin of the vulnerable young people she creates, whether in historical or exotic settings, or in the grim reality of the USA today. With a deft aesthetic touch she avoids simple solutions, building instead on the inner strength and courage of her main characters.”

“Terabithia was their secret, which was a good thing, for how could Jess have ever explained it to an outsider? Just walking down the hill towards the woods made something warm and liquid steal through his body. The closer he came to the dry creek bed and the crab apple tree rope the more he could feel the beating of his heart. He grabbed the end of the rope and swung out toward the other bank with a kind of wild exhilaration and landed gently on his feet, taller and stronger and wiser in that mysterious land.”

Katherine Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia* (Crowell, 1977)



The American author Katherine Paterson was born in 1932 and grew up in a missionary family in China. She began her writing career in America with a number of religious textbooks. Since then, she has written almost 40 books for children and young people, the best-known of which is **Bridge to Terabithia**, which won the Newberry Award in 1978 and has been adapted for the cinema. Her books deal with important and sometimes difficult issues such as broken families and children at risk. Nonetheless, hope and courage also feature strongly in her works.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Katherine Paterson

By Birgitta Fransson

“Oh my word!”, said Katherine Paterson when she got the call from the jury in March 2006 informing her that she was the latest recipient of the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. It was six in the morning at her home in Vermont, USA, and she thought it was a wonderful way to be woken up.

... she wants to portray
real, true people, not
role models for
good behaviour.

Making the call to the award recipient is always the highlight of the year for the jury, but for me, the entire experience of reading Paterson's writing had been nothing but highlights. Her oeuvre reaches from 12th-century Japan to 19th-century China to the United States in the early 20th century to contemporary depictions of children in the US today. I remember her books as psychologically insightful portraits of children, characters who encounter struggles and strive to be seen and acknowledged. When I revisited these books, I was afraid that they perhaps would not have withstood the test of time. It has been quite some time since they were written. But no, I was not disappointed. Paterson has a unique ability to open a window into children's thoughts and emotions. She takes up many topics that can be downright difficult. In *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, a girl is bounced from foster home to foster home, becoming increasingly angry

and rebellious with each move. In *The Same Stuff as Stars*, a girl is abandoned by her mother and left to live with an aging grandmother. In *Bridge to Terabithia*, a boy longs to be acknowledged by a father who only has eyes for his daughters. *Bridge to Terabithia* is a book about grief. The boy's best friend dies in a drowning accident in a creek in Terabithia, the imaginary kingdom in the forest that the two of them created. But all of Paterson's books are astonishingly literary, with a raw and keen sense of humour that saves them from being too weighty or difficult to read. They are books for all ages in the most profound sense. Even adults will find important insights here into children's thoughts and feelings and the way children take responsibility for themselves and the grownups in their lives. Gilly Hopkins could easily be part of a curriculum for social workers, or anyone who works with children.

In the US, some voices have condemned Paterson's use of profanity in her writing, and some schools and libraries have banned her books, calling them anti-Christian. The irony is that Paterson herself comes from a missionary family and is a devout Christian. She is not, however, a moralising author. When asked why she uses profanity in her books, she has said that she wants to portray real, true people, not role models for good behaviour. And a girl like Gilly Hopkins would simply not sound like a Sunday School teacher.

I have had the pleasure of meeting Katherine Paterson several times at children's book conferences around the world. It has always been as fun as it is stimulating. In person, she is as humorous, warm, and open-hearted as her books.

2007

Banco del Libro

The jury's motivation

“In a true pioneering spirit, with ingenuity and a sheer determination, the Banco del Libro has constantly sought new ways of disseminating books and promoting reading among children in Venezuela. Enthusiasm, professionalism, closeness to the children and a refreshing lack of bureaucracy are the hallmarks of the Banco del Libro’s work, whether in shanty towns, mountain villages, universities or out in cyberspace.”

“I believe that books, in some way, reflect the world, and that they are a way of starting to live that world out through fiction that gives you the distance necessary to see things in a different way.”

Maria Beatriz Medina, Managing Director at Banco del Libro



Banco del Libro is a non-profit institution headquartered in Caracas, Venezuela. It was set up in 1960 as a centre for the exchange of textbooks – hence the name, which means Book Bank. Since then, with great creativity and flexibility, Banco del Libro has grown and passed on books and stimulated an appetite for reading and writing among countless numbers of children and young people. Banco del Libro runs Latin America’s biggest documentation centre for children’s literature and functions as a nursery for young researchers, authors, illustrators and others.

Photo: Banco del Libro

Banco del Libro

By Larry Lempert

As I step into the Banco del Libro building in central Caracas, I see a group arriving to visit the library. There is a group of about 70 children of different ages, plus some adults, from Petare, the city's biggest barrio, or slum. They pore eagerly over the books that line the library shelves and cover the tables. We ourselves passed Petare on our way in from the airport. It and several other barrios cling to the hillsides around this metropolis, beautifully situated in the high northern valleys of the Andes, the mountains that stretch from the northernmost reaches of the continent all the way south to Chile and Argentina.

The children have come to browse in person for books and to join in one of the storytelling and book dramatisation events for which they travel here twice yearly from the barrio. As they rummage with interest through the titles, it is obvious that they are no strangers to the world of books. The library itself is well-stocked with a mix of Venezuelan and international literature. The Banco del Libro headquarters are here, so this building is always busy with reading promotion activities for both children and adults: book clubs, reading groups, story hours. Above all, however, Banco del Libro goes where people live, to Petare and the other barrios, where they work together with local volunteers, teachers and librarians.

Thanks to a great deal of imagination and creativity, a project that began in 1960 as a centre for the exchange of textbooks has now grown and branched out into a nationwide operation that spans every arena and genre of children's literature. For more half a century, Banco del Libro have organised a diverse range of projects to provide books to scores of chil-

dren and young people and encourage and inspire them to read and write. They have constructed model libraries, started school library networks, founded a publishing company for children's literature, and published magazines and other writings. They have packed books onto mules, known as bibliomulas, to reach inaccessible mountain villages in the Andes. Their book boats, or bibliofalcas, have navigated the Orinoco River to reach communities in the Amazon. Their book buses and planes have brought books to remote sites all over Venezuela. After catastrophic flooding in the State of Vargas, they developed the Leer para vivir (Read to Live) scheme, which organised hundreds of volunteers to give children and other survivors new hope.

Experiments with new methods, the construction of models and the dissemination of skills and expertise are at the core and are the strength of Banco del Libro's concept. The institution's impact on the entire field of children's literature in Venezuela and its importance for the development and spread of methods of stimulating reading in Latin America spring from the diversity of their activities and innovative approach. The ability with which they implement their projects in the structure of society and their capacity to arouse enthusiasm and inspire people, both in their own projects and in organisations for the promotion of reading all round the world, is significant. For many years, Banco del Libro has also run Latin America's biggest documentation centre for children's literature and functioned as an incubator for young researchers, authors, illustrators, and others in the field of reading promotion.

2008

Sonya Hartnett

The jury's motivation

“Sonya Hartnett is one of the major forces for renewal in modern young adult fiction. With psychological depth and a concealed yet palpable anger, she depicts the circumstances of young people without avoiding the darker sides of life. She does so with linguistic virtuosity and a brilliant narrative technique; her works are a source of strength.”

“Now I would like to tell you about my brother, Tin. James Augustin Barnabas Flute, he was, born on a Thursday and so fated to his wanderings, but we called him Tin for short. He wasn’t my youngest brother, because it’s right to count in Caffy, but I never saw Tin an old man or even a young one, so he stays just a boy in my mind. Tin’s bound up in childhood forever, as far as my recollection goes, although the last time I saw him he was wizened and looking ancient as the hills.”

Sonya Hartnett, **Thursday’s Child** (Penguin, 2000)



Sonya Hartnett was born in 1968 in Melbourne, Australia. She made her publishing debut at just 15 years of age. Since then she has published over 20 books for children, young people and adults that have been translated into multiple languages. Her stories possess a dark humour that makes terrible, even hopeless events both comic and tragic at the same time. **Thursday’s Child** is one of her most acclaimed novels.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Sonya Hartnett

By Mats Berggren

The floor of the office next to mine was piled with books. The office itself belonged to a man who worked for a magazine called *Opsis Kalopsis*, which covered children's culture. In one of the piles on his floor, I caught sight of a book intriguingly titled *The Devil Latch*. The man told me it was a young adult book that the magazine was going to review.

I thought it looked interesting and asked to borrow it. It didn't take me long to realize that its author, Sonya Hartnett, was an extraordinary writer. Here were psychological depths that had never before been reached in children's literature – and the things Hartnett described were sometimes very hard to read. People who are abused as children never fully heal.

Yet she also described the allure of darkness, horror and malevolence in a way that felt chillingly real.

I became almost obsessed with Hartnett's novels. Along with my fellow jury members, I read them one after another, watching as time after time Hartnett broke not only the boundaries between young adult and adult literature, but her own personal boundaries as well. In every book she did something new, but always with the same powerful psychological grounding. Usually she wrote about small, close-knit

groups – a family, a set of twins, a cluster of friends. She is a master at capturing the dynamics of such groups: the currents of dependency and loyalty, the wounds, the love and hate, the relationship between power and subordination.

She is without a doubt one of the foremost authors breaking new ground for young adult literature.

I became almost obsessed with Hartnett's novels.

At her award ceremony in 2008, we invited the gentleman from *Opsis Kalopsis*. I introduced him to Sonya Hartnett and told her the story of how I had found her book in his office. She narrowed her eyes at him and asked: "Why had you thrown me on the floor?"

We on the jury write many texts about our laureates. Everything we write is true, but here's the real reason I wanted to give Sonya Hartnett the award: her books make my knees shake.

2009

Tamer Institute

The jury's motivation

“With perseverance, audacity and resourcefulness, the Tamer Institute has, for two decades, stimulated Palestinian children’s and young adults’ love of reading – and their creativity. Under difficult circumstances, the Institute carries out reading promotion of an unusual breadth and versatility. In the spirit of Astrid Lindgren, the Tamer Institute acknowledges the power of words and the strength of books, stories and imagination as important keys to self-esteem, tolerance and the courage to face life.”

“With words we overcome walls.”

Tamer Institute for Community Education



The Tamer Institute for Community Education is an independent organisation that carries out reading promotion work for children and young people in the West Bank and Gaza. The institute was founded in 1989 to give children access to books and alternative learning as children's and young people's schooling, leisure time and lives suffered from the troubles in the area. They organise writing workshops, storytelling and drama classes, reading campaigns and literary discussion for children and young people. They also supply libraries with children's books and they train librarians and parents.

Photo: Tamer Institute

Tamer Institute

By Henry Ascher

With words, we overcome walls. This is how the Tamer Institute for Community Education defines the starting point for its activities. A *tamer* is a person who carefully moves pollen grains from a male date palm to a female in order to fertilise it and create conditions for new life. The staff and volunteers at the Tamer Institute create the conditions for life by getting books and information to the Palestinian children and young people in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, and to the most remote, isolated villages that lack electricity or are surrounded by walls and roadblocks. But the Tamer Institute do more than provide information and books. They create conditions for children to express themselves. Reading and writing go hand in hand. The organisation arranges writing competitions, helps children and young people publish a newspaper and works to collect Palestinian fairy tales and stories. The Tamer Institute also work to inspire children to express themselves artistically, through creative writing, music, theatre or the visual arts. Children's learning is regarded as an essential aspect of their development.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts every child's right to development as well as the right to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. Children need more than to simply survive. They need help to live and thrive. For the Tamer Institute, respect for fundamental human rights is central: respect for diversity and equality, as well as respect for dissent. Children who learn to express themselves and to develop critical thinking skills do not easily fall prey to political and religious propaganda.

With words, we overcome walls. It is a bold starting point in a society where physical walls, up to 8 meters high, are an everyday reality. Most children living in the West Bank have never been able to go to the sea, which is only an hour's drive away. Children's libraries

in the blockaded Gaza Strip have been bombed to pieces. But it is true nonetheless. In my work as a paediatrician, I have seen it over and over again. Words and creativity are a way for children living with inner and outer walls to fly over them, pass through them, sometimes even blow them up. I have met traumatised children, forced to become refugees, who write poems and rap lyrics. I have encountered undocumented children who have managed to survive thanks to the school orchestra or the football team. I can remember a seriously ill girl who underwent a complex, extensive surgical procedure. She spent quite a long time in the intensive care unit in critical condition. One day, all of her test results looked good. She's turned the corner, we thought. But we could see that she was not feeling well at all. Could it be that she was sad, that she was deher play – as much she could manage in her condition – and put up some nice pictures on the walls in the hospital room. The act of playing did what our medications could not. It turned things around. Today the girl is grown.

Words, images and opportunities for creative expression can help children gain insight into themselves. Through seriousness and humour, literature can help children realise that they are not alone, that it is possible to reach the other side of the wall. Through the power of imagination, new doors open. Many children around the world have found comfort and joy in Astrid Lindgren's books. I once read an interview with a child in the West Bank who had read *The Brothers Lionheart* in an Arabic translation. She was amazed and wondered how an old lady in a faraway country could write a book about Palestine and her own life.

Words can be vital. They can overcome inner walls and outer ones, no matter what shape they take. Astrid Lindgren knew this, and the Tamer Institute knows it as well.

2010

Kitty Crowther

The jury's motivation

“Kitty Crowther is the master of line but also of atmosphere. She maintains the tradition of the picture book while transforming and renewing it. In her world, the door between imagination and reality is wide open. She addresses the reader gently and personally, but with profound effect. In her deeply felt empathy with people in difficulty, she shows ways in which weakness can be turned into strength. Humanism and sympathy permeate and unify her artistry.”



Kitty Crowther, **L'enfant racine**
(l'École des loisirs, 2003)

Kitty Crowther, **La visite de Petite Mort** (l'École des loisirs, 2004)



Kitty Crowther (b. 1970) is an illustrator and author living and working in Belgium. She has produced more than 40 picture books, around half of which have been translated into Swedish and other languages. Working mainly in pencil, Indian ink and coloured pencil, she produces inimitable images of a completely unique character.

Photo: Lydie Nesvadba

Kitty Crowther

By Maria Lassén-Seger

A small house beside a lake, surrounded by forest and dense, verdant vegetation. Here I imagine Kitty Crowther sitting, following her pen moving across the paper while her stories unfold and take shape. As her reader, I too am allowed to imagine things – in book after book, she has told me so.

Crowther's picture book universe is a place where I can think and feel without restraint.

The first of Crowther's picture books that I read and fell in love with tells the story of Death and an angel (*La visite de petite mort*), who forge a friendship that dispels both their own loneliness and that of all dying souls. This book formed my introduction to Crowther's warm relationship dramas and her trademark melancholy. As I read more of her work, I discovered a *Wunderkammer* of quiet but intense stories, inhabited by fairy tale animals, mythical spirits of nature, and children and adults equally in need of security and freedom.

For me, Crowther's greatness lies in both hand and head: that is to say, in both her drawings and her narratives. Undulating lines retain their spontaneous vibrancy; facial expressions and gestures are masterfully captured. Over the years, her bold colour choices have grown even bolder: one book is done

in intense pink, while in others, the outlines of the characters glow in unexpected shades ranging from red to orange. Crowther is a master not only of line, but also of mood and emotion. Sorrow, loss, fear, joy, longing – she shows the full range of her emotional palette in books that adamantly refuse to underestimate their readers. On the contrary, her books assure me that I – the reader – and my emotions deserve to be taken with the greatest seriousness.

Crowther's picture book universe is a place where I can think and feel without restraint. Her stories take me to places I can only reach in my imagination: down under the water, deep below the earth's surface, far into the forest. Here every living thing has inherent worth, and I watch events unfold with a sense of quiet wonder. The importance of creativity and the imagination is portrayed in scenes of joyful reading and storytelling, or even (and why not?) in a walk with God. Her plots are seldom predictable, as a Crowther book always accommodates a mystery: an abandoned Root Child, a talking dog, a little insect family of two.

To me, an ALMA laureate should be one of a kind. Not only in the sense of having a unique style or unique subject matter, but in being able to tell a story *their* way, without compromise, based on their own vision. Crowther does exactly that. Her visionary work also reassures me that the most important thing we have is each other and our ability to share stories. In that little house by the lake – which does in fact appear now and then in Crowther's picture books – the door is always left ajar.

2011

Shaun Tan

The jury's motivation

“Shaun Tan is a masterly visual storyteller, pointing the way ahead to new possibilities for picture books. His pictorial worlds constitute a separate universe where nothing is self-evident and anything is possible. Memories of childhood and adolescence are fixed reference points, but the pictorial narrative is universal and touches everyone, regardless of age. Behind a wealth of minutely detailed pictures, where civilization is criticized and history depicted through symbolism, there is a palpable warmth. People are always present, and Shaun Tan portrays both our searching and our alienation. He combines brilliant, magical narrative skill with deep humanism.”

Shaun Tan, **The Arrival** (Lothian Books, 2006)



Shaun Tan was born in 1974 in Fremantle in western Australia. Tan is an illustrator who creates visually spectacular narratives. His most critically acclaimed book, **The Arrival**, is a novel about an emigrant family. Tan also collaborates on animated film, musical and theatrical adaptations of his works, as well as producing fine art and murals. In 2011 he won the Oscar for Best Animated Short Film for **The Lost Thing**, based on the book of the same name.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Shaun Tan

By Per Gustavsson

Four giant men are walking through a big city. They have funnel-shaped devices on their backs, and it looks like they are vacuuming the streets. People, animals, birds – everything is getting sucked up. This image made me feel extremely uncomfortable when I first saw it. It was impossible to not to be drawn in. What strange story was being told here? Who were the giants? It was a picture from the book *The Arrival*, and this was my first encounter with the visual world of Shaun Tan.

The Arrival tells the story of a man who has left his home in search of a better life in another country. It is a scenario as relevant today as it was centuries ago. Tan describes the confusion of being in a country where everything, from the language and culture to the animal world, is new and unknown. The story switches between everyday scenes in which the main character slowly but surely makes his way in society, and other encounters that are so unintelligible they border on the surreal.

Tan confronts the feeling of being an outsider in other books, too. The theme reappears both in *The Red Tree* and in several short stories from the book *Tales from Outer Suburbia*. Reality is turned upside down; a once-familiar neighbourhood is suddenly beset with something foreign and difficult to grasp.

In an article, Tan reveals that many of his stories are originally based on images. It is the image that gives birth to the stories. And it is in his pictures that he shines brightest. Partly by virtue of his sheer technical skill, but also because he never lets technique take over. In Tan's illustrations, his hand – the movement of brush or pen across the page – is always present. His pictures vibrate with life.

“We are all crazy.
But many people do
their best to hide it.”

I remember the ceremony where Shaun Tan received his award. Just before things wrapped up, the presenter asked one last question: “How is it that your stories and images are so strange when you yourself seem so normal and quiet?” Tan replied, “We are all crazy. But many people do their best to hide it.” And that is the very reason his books are so appealing. Because even though the strange creatures that appear can feel scary at first, it seems that most of them are just looking for a home or something true they can hold on to. Exactly like the rest of us.

2012

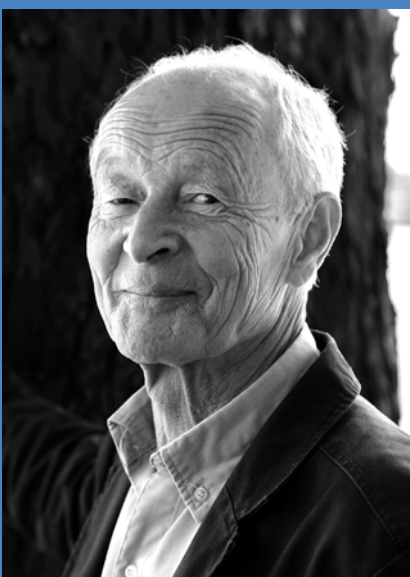
Guus Kuijer

The jury's motivation

“With an unprejudiced gaze and a sharp intellect, Guus Kuijer portrays both the problems facing contemporary society and life’s big questions. Respect for children is as self-evident in his works as his rejection of intolerance and oppression. Kuijer combines serious subject matter and razor-sharp realism with warmth, subtle humour and visionary flights of fancy. His simple, clear and precise style accommodates both deep philosophical insight and graceful poetic expression.”

“He looked out the window to think, because without a window he couldn’t think. Or maybe it was the other way around: When there was a window, he automatically started to think. Then he wrote, ‘When I grow up, I am going to be happy.’”

Guus Kuijer, *The book of everything* (Arthur A. Levine, 2006)



Guus Kuijer (b. 1942) is a Dutch author and public debater who portrays both the problems facing contemporary society and life’s big questions. He worked as a teacher before making his debut as a children’s author in 1975. He has published over 30 titles, most aimed at readers on the cusp of their teenage years. Key works include **Het boek van alle dingen** (The Book of Everything), **Florian Knol** and the series of five books about the girl Polleke.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Guus Kuijer

By Ulf Boëthius

Guus Kuijer is very much a contemporary writer. His books offer a glimpse into virtually all of the trials and tribulations of modern society. All are handled with a remarkable lightness of touch. Kuijer lays bare the problems of modern existence, without moralisation or judgement. He almost always tells a story from the perspective of a child, although his books are often just as enjoyable for adults.

Kuijer continually
presents his readers
with important and
interesting questions ...

His main characters tend to be strong girls, who in various ways serve to reveal society's prejudices and conventions. This is perhaps best exemplified in Kuijer's five books about Polleke. Polleke's parents are separated. Her father, whom she adores, is a drug addict who wears an Indian kaftan and writes poetry. Her mother is in a relationship with Polleke's teacher. And twelve-year-old Polleke is in love with a boy from a family whose values are very conservative, particularly when it comes to relationships between the sexes. In the background are Polleke's

grandparents, who are devoutly religious and live in the country.

Kuijer's books are thus a true microcosm of contemporary life. But just as much as social issues interest him, so too does language itself and the ways we express ourselves. His writing style is distinctive: simple, clear, precise sentences where every word seems charged with significance. Often he chooses words that we recognise from earlier passages, where, however, they meant something a little different. Kuijer's interest in language is particularly evident in *Florian Knol*, where he continually revisits certain words and phrases, repeating and varying them like musical themes. Florian turns words this way and that, pondering not only their meaning but also their pronunciation. How do we tell seriousness from irony? How do we know if Father means what he says, or if those are just empty words? Why do we call a fork a fork? And why would a woman with Alzheimer's suddenly start calling her door key a fork?

Kuijer continually presents his readers with important and interesting questions, without ever becoming rigid or pedantic. On the contrary, both his social observations and his linguistic musings are downright amusing – and poetic. Kuijer is not only an astute observer of modern society but also an artist of the written word.

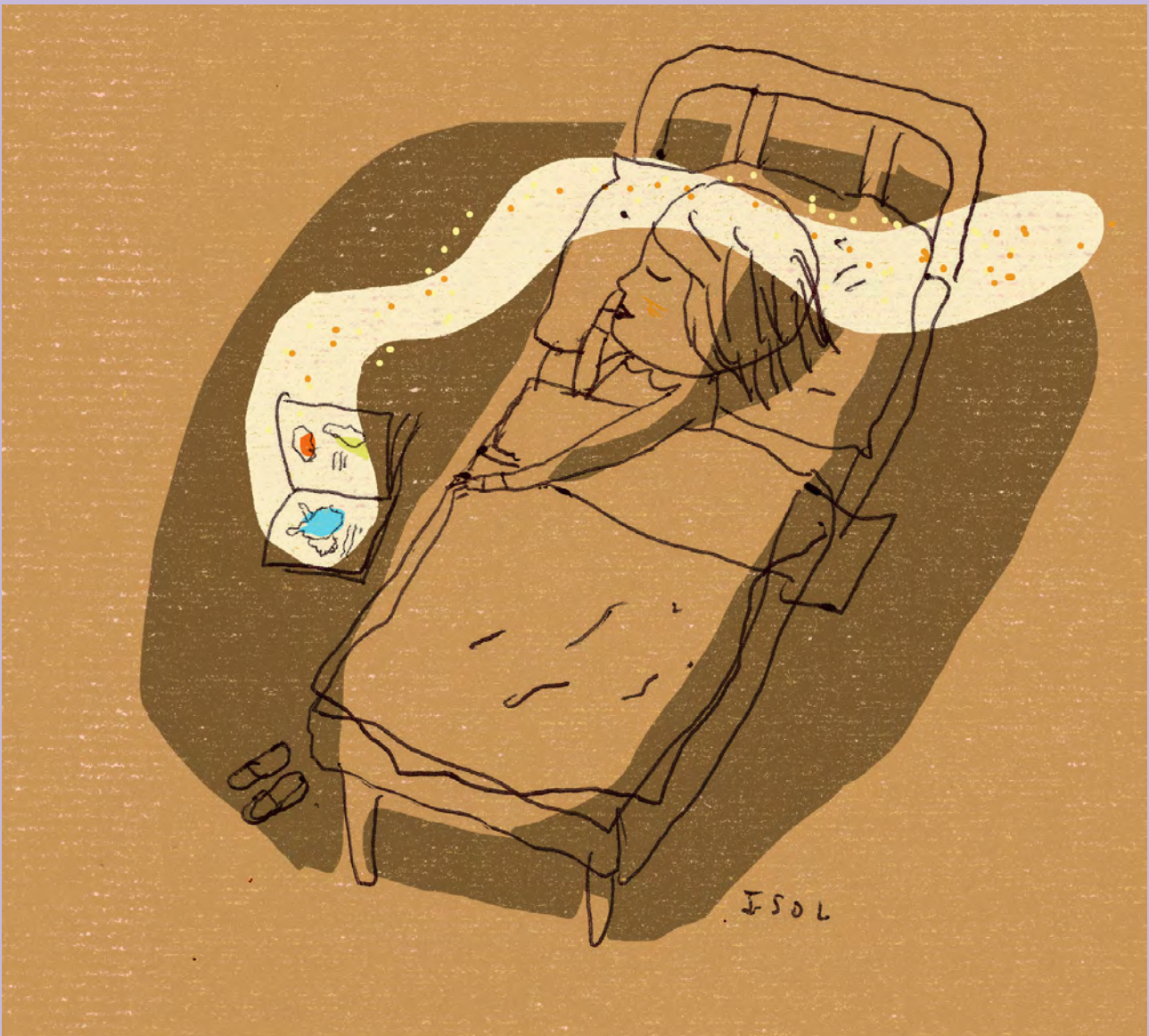
2013

Isol

The jury's motivation

“Isol creates picture books from the eye level of the child. Her pictures vibrate with energy and explosive emotions. With a restrained palette and ever-innovative pictorial solutions, she shifts ingrained perspectives and pushes the boundaries of the picture book medium. Taking children’s clear view of the world as her starting point, she addresses their questions with forceful artistic expression and offers open answers. With liberating humour and levity, she also deals with the darker aspects of existence.”

Illustration by Isol



Marisol Misenta, better known as Isol, is an Argentinian picture book artist, cartoonist, graphic artist, author and pop singer. Born in Buenos Aires in 1972, she published her first book in 1997. Her books have since been published in some 20 countries. Her style is expressive and at times explosive, using a sophisticated technique of double outlines and deliberate print misregistration where the lines and colours are not completely aligned.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Isol

By Mats Kempe

When the call came that afternoon – I was heading home from the preschool, my children were dashing ahead of me to the car, *Hello*, I was running after them, trying to keep up – suddenly a window opened to the world. *Would you like to be on the ALMA jury?* I was very familiar with ALMA already. As a librarian who specialized in non-European fiction, I went over the nomination lists for the second-biggest literature award in the world with a fine-toothed comb, both to orient myself and to discover interesting books by writers from other countries. But with a limited purchasing budget at the library where I worked, I mostly knew the authors only by name. *Of course I want to be on the ALMA jury!* And so I got access to ALMA's entire amazing library. All the books were there, with all the names I knew from the nomination lists printed on their spines – row after row of them, many in more than one copy.

The rest of the jury quickly let me know that there was a young Argentinian author and illustrator whom I might want to take an extra look at. Actually, the advice was unnecessary, because Isol's books drew my gaze with a magnetic attraction. I borrowed every one of her books from the library, packed them all into a carry-on bag, and took them home. And there was one – one I just had to share with my children. We curled up in a corner of my youngest daughter's bed and we read *Nocturne*, the book of recipes for dreams. We turned on the bedside lamp and looked at the pages. We turned off the lamp and watched the dreams rise into the darkness, glowing with flo-

rescent light. We turned on the lamp and the dreams dissolved in its light. We turned the page and turned off the lamp and a new dream appeared, shining softly in the dark.

... Isol's books drew
my gaze with a
magnetic attraction.

Isol became the first recipient of the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award whom I had a hand in selecting. She would travel to Sweden to attend the award ceremony, and I myself would have the privilege of interviewing her in front of an audience on a few occasions. But in the end, all of that is a bit beside the point. What Isol really gave me was the greatest reading experience I ever had with my children. Eventually I got my daughters their own copy of *Nocturne*. My eldest daughter will turn 18 in a few months, but that book still occupies a special place on her bookshelf. Isol wrote a note on its front page and drew a picture. It shows my daughters floating, moving towards those dreams. Because maybe that's precisely what literature should do in our lives – expand reality to also embrace dreams and the imagination.

So from me and my now nearly grown-up children – thank you, Isol!

2014

Barbro Lindgren

The jury's motivation

“Barbro Lindgren is a literary pioneer. Using adventurous language and rich psychological nuance, she has re-invented not only the picture book for the very young but also the absurd prose story, the existential children’s poem, and realistic young adult fiction. With perfect pitch, she presents to us both playful shenanigans and moments of bright joy, the inscrutable nature of life and the nearness of death.”

“I think there’s a big difference between being 13 and being 15. When I was 13, I thought it was the best age ever. I still think so. It *was* my best age ever! I guess things are more exciting now – like with boys. But I also feel a little emptier inside. More alone, I guess. I don’t really know how to describe it.”

Barbro Lindgren, **Bladen brinner** (Karneval, 2010, 1st ed.: Rabén & Sjögren, 1973).
Translated for this folder by the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award



Barbro Lindgren (b. 1937) is the author of many Swedish children’s classics. Her innovative and multifaceted body of work includes children’s books, poetry and pieces for the stage, as well as books for adults and readers of all ages. She published her first book in 1965 and has since produced some 100 titles. Her books have received numerous awards and have been translated into many languages.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Barbro Lindgren

By Balsam Karam

I don't want anyone to read this. Not even my mother. And not Tobias, although we've known each other for so long. My secret isn't so remarkable, but the shame of it is indelible – like a lot of other children, I used to steal. Not from the candy store, and not anything valuable; I stole toys from my friends. Betraying a trust like that is a terrible thing, and I knew it even then. No one has ever believed me, because I never got caught, but it is the truth, and now I have written it down for no one to read.

As I read, I understood that this book was describing real life ...

I probably would never have taken my truth seriously if one day, on one of my countless trips to the library, I hadn't picked up a book that is now very important to me. The name of the book is *Jättehemligt* (Super Secret). This might have been the day I was checking to make sure I had really read every single book Astrid Lindgren had ever written. All I know is that suddenly, in a fit of bravery, I dared to reach out and touch the spine of a book by another amazing Lindgren. Possibly I thought at first that Astrid and Barbro were sisters (for a long time I believed that all people with the same last name were related). Or maybe I was just curious to know whether the stories

really came from Barbro Lindgren's own life. But all of that ceased to matter as I sat down, right then and there on a couch at the Skiljebo Library, and (having become perfectly convinced that it was true) read *Jättehemligt* from cover to cover.

As I read, I understood that this book was describing real life: childhood not only at moments of peak emotional drama (when words *love*, *hate* and *sad* fill the diary pages), but also during times when things feel awkward, mundane, maybe a little meaningless.

The glories of Barbro Lindgren's *Jättehemligt*, *Världshemligt* (Top Secret) and *Bladen brinner* (Pages on Fire) are many. The books forge an immediate bond of trust that no reader will break lightly. And in just a few hundred pages, they cover an entire life. Perhaps the most glorious thing about these books is that they exist at all – that the voice and perspective of the child, from which they never deviate, has been treated with such gravity and given centre stage. It is a voice of trenchant observation, offering up thoughts on a neighbour who is losing her memory, a doll named Dock Dock who sometimes needs a good thumping, and how it feels to be happy but not beautiful. Here too are deep sadness, uncertainty about the meaning of life, and an impatience to grow breasts – in short, all the things that really matter.

By the time the library closed, I had finished all three of those books. Then over the weekend, I read them all again.

2015

PRAESA

The jury's motivation

“With the joy of reading as its compass point, PRAESA opens new routes into the world of books and literature for young readers in South Africa. Through innovative reading and storytelling projects, PRAESA brings people together and brings literature in multiple languages alive. PRAESA’s outstanding work shows the crucial role of books and stories in creating rich lives for children and young people.”

“We’re all storytellers,
as human beings’
storytelling is how we
make sense of our lives.”

Carole Bloch, Executive Director PRAESA



The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) was founded in Cape Town in 1992. PRAESA is an organisation that works to promote reading among children and young people and to highlight the importance of literature for both individual and societal development. In a variety of reading and storytelling projects, they focus on reading for pleasure, child self-esteem and providing access to native language literature.

Photo: Marelize Lubowski

PRAESA

By Annika Edlund

PRAESA are a true role model for all of us who work to promote reading around the world. They inspire us through their tireless efforts to make literature available in more languages and to foster storytelling through reading clubs, volunteer work and networking. New ideas and projects are always being posted on their website and on social media platforms.

... falling in love with one book can change your whole attitude towards reading ...

In South Africa, many children reach adulthood having never read a single book in their native language. Historically, hardly any children's books have been published in several of the official languages of South Africa, and today, the number of titles is still too few. But PRAESA are working diligently to address this issue and they are constantly expanding their activities. Recently, they put out a translation of Astrid Lindgren's book *The Brothers Lionheart* into isiXhosa. The book is available to download for free from their website, making it possible for many more people to now read the book in their native language. On their website under the heading "Here's a Story", readers can also find other new books in several different languages, as well as ideas and reading guides. PRAESA are an unending source of ideas for promoting storytelling and reading aloud. They focus on making reading a game and thus nurturing

the desire to seek out reading experiences. The book becomes just a starting point for more questions and reflections, using prompts like "Think about...". These techniques let new stories take root and grow in our own imaginations.

"It's not enough to produce materials. You have to get them into the right hands. We want everyone to become a master storyteller," says Carole Bloch, executive director of PRAESA.

PRAESA work in vulnerable areas and make long-term investments in quality fiction in many different languages. They encourage parents, grandparents and teachers to share reading experiences with children. The joy of reading is a strong driver for all their activities. Again and again, they have shown us how falling in love with one book can change your whole attitude towards reading, and even towards life.

PRAESA's work inspires our own continued efforts to place books in children's hands, to organise reading clubs, to awaken the joy of storytelling. Above all, they inspire us to teach children and adults alike to delight in stories and stretch their imaginations, so that they can discover all the pleasures that books and narratives have to offer.

One of PRAESA's goals is to give all South African children the opportunity to become imaginative and critical readers – and writers – regardless of their native language or socio-economic background.

It is a lofty goal but not out of reach. Let's make PRAESA's goal our goal too!

2016

Meg Rosoff

The jury's motivation

“Meg Rosoff’s young adult novels speak to the emotions as well as the intellect. In sparkling prose, she writes about the search for meaning and identity in a peculiar and bizarre world. Her brave and humorous stories are one-of-a-kind. She leaves no reader unmoved.”

“My God, David thought. If I’d been two seconds slower he’d be dead. My brother would be dead but *I’d* be the one shattered, crushed, destroyed by guilt and blame and everyone everywhere for the rest of my life whispering *He’s that kid who killed his brother.*”

Two seconds. Just two seconds were all that stood between normal everyday life and utter, total catastrophe.”

Meg Rosoff, **Just in case** (Penguin, 2006)



Meg Rosoff was born in 1956 in the United States but has resided for the past 30 years in London. After a long career in the advertising industry, at age 46 she published her first novel, the widely acclaimed **How I Live Now**. In addition to her novels for young adults, she is the author of several picture books, one novel for adults, and a four-book series for young readers about a dog named McTavish.

Photo: Paul Musso

Meg Rosoff

By Boel Westin

In her young adult novels, Meg Rosoff returns time and again to the young person's search for meaning and identity. It is a theme as timeless as the desire to cross the boundaries between childhood, youth and adulthood. The circumstances may be challenging, even terrifying, but there is always space for shining and humorous stories of empathy, loyalty and love. The insight that life at any age can change in an instant lies at the heart of Rosoff's writing. A brilliant example is *Just in Case* (2006), a breakneck tale of the inner and outer metamorphoses of fifteen-year-old David, in which a belief in destiny plays an important role. Another is the suggestive novel of memories, *What I Was* (2007), a story about liberation, love and individual awakening that expands into an exploration of how the past affects our experience of the present. At the very beginning of the novel we are told the basic conditions of the story: "Rule number one: Trust no one."

Her sharp, sparkling prose is often highly visual and at times expansively cinematic.

"My job is to think," Meg Rosoff has said, and her texts are often conspicuously reflexive. There is a special kind of tension in her narration, a mix of clarity and mystery that inexorably draws the reader into the story. Rosoff moves with ease between different narrative techniques. Her sharp, sparkling prose is often highly visual and at times expansively cinematic. Images that can be interpreted in multiple ways often

figure centrally, sometimes offering key insights into the story. In *Picture Me Gone* (2013), written as a road movie, the main character studies a photograph and experiences a deep longing for something loved and lost: the love of a father, perhaps. Loss and remembrance always figure in Rosoff's writing, not least in her most recent novel, *The Great Godden* (2020).

Sometimes paintings and photographs are used as mirrors to reflect her characters' emotions and experiences, as in the debut novel, *How I Live Now* (2004), where a painting with the unambiguous title "The Calm before the Storm" serves just such a purpose. Amidst the chaos of war, famine, and unrest, there is no time for reflection; all that matters are the immediate demands of the present moment. The novel is a shattering depiction of war and the merciless conditions it imposes for survival and love, consistently shown from the young person's point of view. Filtering her story through the eyes of a young first-person narrator is Rosoff's usual strategy, but all of her narrators are very different from one another, and no two of her books are alike.

In her work, Rosoff continually challenges values, ideas, and experiences. Everything can change; nothing can be taken for granted. God might take the form of a hormonal teenager, as in the theological satire *There is No Dog* (2011). Nor does she make any clear distinction between humans and animals. Dogs are her favourite subjects, but rabbits, goats, moose and horses also make frequent appearances. Seeing the world through the eyes of an animal can offer extremely invigorating new perspectives.

The same goes for Meg Rosoff herself. Through her stories, she gives us new strength to examine our own lives.

2017

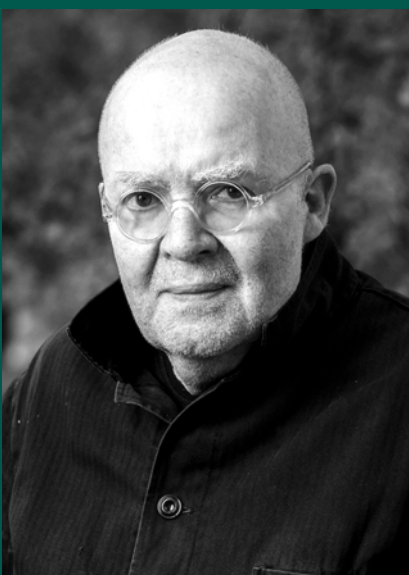
Wolf Erlbruch

The jury's motivation

“Wolf Erlbruch makes existential questions accessible and manageable for readers of all ages. With humour and warmth deeply rooted in humanist ideals, his work presents the universe on our scale. He is a master of the illustrator's art who honours tradition whilst opening new creative doors. Wolf Erlbruch is a careful and caring visionary.”



Wolf Erlbruch, **Duck, Death and the Tulip** (Gecko press, 2008) and Werner Holzwarth & Wolf Erlbruch, **The Story of the Little Mole Who Went in Search of Whodunit** (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2007)



Wolf Erlbruch (b. 1948) is a German illustrator and picture book maker. He is the author and illustrator of about 10 picture book titles and has illustrated nearly 50 works by other authors. His work is rooted in a long tradition and is characterised by strong lines and graphic precision. Books like **The Story of the Little Mole Who Went in Search of Whodunit** and **Duck, Death and the Tulip** have been embraced by readers and critics around the world.

Photo: Stefan Tell

Wolf Erlbruch

By Lennart Eng

“Fifteen minutes of fame”? No; not for Wolf Erlbruch. “Timeless”? That’s much better, although perhaps a little too formal (for him, at least).

Now just a moment! Is this children’s literature we’re talking about?

It is the ability to be true to oneself, to do “your own thing” without seeking approval or succumbing to trends, that produces the best stories, the ones that truly stand the test of time. Wolf Erlbruch has that kind of integrity. His work is clearly driven by personal motivation, a genuine desire to explore the topics he raises in his books.

Sometimes boldly, sometimes reluctantly, Erlbruch’s characters take on big questions. Questions of life and death, freedom and identity. Questions about who, what, how, why. In all, he gives us more questions than answers. But he also gives us tools to help us process and reflect upon the human condition.

Now just a moment! Is this children’s literature we’re talking about? Indeed it is, and that is precisely why Wolf Erlbruch is such a worthy ALMA laureate. His ability to address what are usually known as “difficult” topics opens doorways to discussion and reflection. His tool of trade is the picture book, a narrative medium that he perfectly commands. His virtuosic illustrations send roots back into history and forward into the unknown, stretching out feelers of curiosity and experimentation. Like many classic fairy tales, his books are often about animals, but unlike many other storytellers, Erlbruch allows his animals to remain “animal-like”, rather of turning them into saccharine versions of themselves.

And I think there is still one thing missing from this description. Erlbruch can also be a real prankster. He has a sense of humour, while often over the top, is also always affectionate and available. Just as a Shakespeare play may swing between drama and farce, his books also feature dynamic, occasionally abrupt shifts of register. Wolf Erlbruch is a creator of picture books for the ages.

2018

Jacqueline Woodson

The jury's motivation

“Jacqueline Woodson introduces us to resilient young people fighting to find a place where their lives can take root. In language as light as air, she tells stories of resounding richness and depth. Jacqueline Woodson captures a unique poetic note in a daily reality divided between sorrow and hope.”

“Look for the beauty, my
mama says. Always look
for the beauty. It’s in every
single body you meet.
The girl smiles. She has
a pretty smile.”

Jacqueline Woodson, *Hush* (Penguin, 2002)



Jacqueline Woodson (b. 1963) is an American author of novels, poetry, and children’s books. Her books frequently tell stories of young people poised on the threshold of adulthood. Racism, segregation, economic injustice, social vulnerability, prejudice and sexual identity are all recurring themes. She is perhaps best known as the author of the acclaimed autobiographical work **Brown Girl Dreaming** (2014).

Photo: Stefan Tell

Jacqueline Woodson

By Mårten Sandén

Jacqueline Woodson is the author of about 40 books for readers of all ages, from preschoolers to adults. She commands genres from realism to prose poetry in a voice that shifts with ease from the epic to the mundane. Her prose is nuanced, vivid and economical, whether she is writing a descriptive text for middle-grade students or an impressionistic rendering of the teenage condition in flowing, weightless verse. She views existence and her own characters with a gaze of unfaltering warmth. Her characters often struggle, against external circumstances or their own conflicting emotions, but she always extends the promise that both people and circumstances can change. The world can be a harsh place in Woodson's books, but compassion and hope are always within reach, and she won't give anyone up for lost.

As a child, Woodson says, she was constantly telling stories, more or less truthful (usually less). She would write on walls, sidewalks, paper bags – even her own shoes. Today, the act of writing forms a major and recurring theme in many of her books. For the young people she portrays, writing and reading are powerful tools for changing both themselves and the world. Finding and telling one's own story is simultaneously a source of growth and an act of jubilant rebellion. It can be a source of comfort when no other comfort is at hand.

Jacqueline Woodson is a distinctly American writer. Her stories unfold in settings – the anonymous rural communities of South Carolina, with their modest homes and filling stations; the inner-city neighbourhoods of Brooklyn – that are instantly recognisable.

If we have never visited them in person, we have seen them in hundreds of movies, read about them in hundreds of books. But Woodson's pen lets us view these familiar environments from new angles and in different lights. In her clear-eyed portrayals, rooted in her personal history, they vibrate with life.

Woodson's characters are also recognisable, tied tightly to a place, a time and a social order. They are unequivocally and distinctly American, usually more or less contemporary with Woodson herself and her readers. We can place them by everything from their worldview to their taste in music and clothing. They have been shaped by personal experiences of resistance and longing, love and hope, as well as life-changing events such as the great migration from the small farms of the American South to the industrial cities in the north, the civil rights movement, and the Vietnam War.

And yet Woodson consistently manages to tell stories that could have been set almost anywhere, at any time in history. To me, this is the key to her greatness as an author for children and young people. She taps into her own experiences and her own unique surroundings to tell stories that concern us all. The people in her stories could have lived at any other time, in any other place, and we would still understand the things that happen to them, how they are affected and what they feel.

Woodson writes about characters who could have been anyone. They could have been us.

2019

Bart Moeyaert

The jury's motivation

“Bart Moeyaert’s condensed and musical language vibrates with suppressed emotions and unspoken desires. He portrays relationships at crisis point with a cinematic immediacy, even as his complex narratives suggest new ways forward. Bart Moeyaert’s luminous work underscores the fact that books for children and young people have a self-evident place in world literature.”

“My life and your life are intertwined, Mother”, says Axel. “Things are the way they are. He turns the key in the ignition, indicating that he doesn’t expect a reply. The car sings and roars. For the rest, people’s words are superfluous whether their lives are interwoven or not. The doors slam shut as if they never had to be opened again, and we all lurch back because of the way Axel accelerates.”

Bart Moeyaert, *It's love we don't understand* (Front Street, 2001)



Bart Moeyaert is a Belgian author residing in Antwerp. He was born in 1964 and published his first book when he was just 19 years old. Since then, he has produced a varied body of work that includes not only books for children and young people but also poetry, theatre pieces, song lyrics, scripts and essays. His books continue to be released in new editions and have received translations in more than 20 countries.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm

Bart Moeyaert

By Katarina Kieri

Traditionally the world of literature thinks a lot about age. It likes to create age groups and build fences around them. The books of Bart Moeyaert are a refreshing exception. They resist categorisation in a way that may cause headaches for fence-builders, but in the long run offers the best defence for young people's right to be people on equal terms with everyone else. Everyone in Moeyaert's books, no matter their age, is equally in the hands of fate. We go through what we go through, the author seems to say. We carry what we have to.

Simply close your eyes
and you can see his
scenes unfurl ...

Moeyaert trusts his readers to do the same. He never sees things in black and white or draws easy distinctions between good and evil, heroes and villains. Often the motivation for his characters' actions only appears on the outskirts of the story, perhaps as something absent or broken, a deficiency that we sense but never really see.

When Moeyaert was announced as the recipient of the 2019 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, the citation of the jury read in part: "He portrays relationships at crisis point with a cinematic immediacy, even as his complex narratives suggest new ways forward".

It wasn't hard to sign on to that wording. Simply close your eyes and you can see his scenes unfurl on the movie screen inside your head: the dysfunctional family in *It's Love We Don't Understand*, crammed together in a car on a scorching summer day; Ward and his friend in *Bare Hands*, fleeing Betjeman's property on New Year's Eve after killing one of his geese; Oskar and his big brother Bossie in the *Milky Way*, sitting on a wall in late summer, looking out over the neighbourhood at the lady who walks past with her dog each day, and taking bets on which of them, the lady or the dog, will die first.

But if Moeyaert's books are "cinematic", that does not necessarily mean that they lend themselves to cinematic adaptation. His is a truly literary mastery. It is the writer's keen and persistent gaze that creates such powerful images and moods and generates such nuance and complexity both in and between the lines.

2020

Baek Heena

The jury's motivation

“With exquisite feeling for materials, looks and gestures, Baek Heena’s filmic picture books stage stories about solitude and solidarity. In her evocative miniature worlds, cloud bread and sorbet moons, animals, bath fairies and people converge. Her work is a doorway to the marvellous: sensuous, dizzying and sharp.”

Baek Heena, *Al-sa-taang* [Magic Candies]
(Bear Books, 2017)



Baek Heena (b. 1971) is a South Korean picture book artist. She worked in advertising and animated film before debuting as an author in 2004. She is the author of about a dozen quirky, highly innovative picture book that after long popularity in Asia have also found their way to readers around the world. To achieve her distinctive style, she crafts her own tiny figurines, often in clay, along with entire environments that she lights and photographs with painstaking care.

Photo: Ewha Womans University

Baek Heena

By Elina Druker

In the picture book *Magic Candies* by Baek Heena, we encounter a picture of a child who is closely studying a pink gum ball that he is holding between his thumb and forefinger. The world around the boy seems to disappear, and all focus is on this moment of fascination and wonder. The image is characteristic of the sensitivity and curiosity that characterise Baek Heena as a storyteller. Her stories focus our gaze both on small, everyday things and the curious, sensuous nature of the world around us. In her books, everyday life can be turned on its head. In *Magic Candies*, for example, the candies of the title give the lonely boy who is the book's protagonist an instant ability to communicate with animals and everyday objects. This transformation of his environment leads the boy to some surprising new discoveries. He conducts a conversation with his ageing dog, receives a message from his beloved grandmother from beyond the grave, and perhaps most importantly of all, learns to understand his father's awkward attempts at showing love. *Magic Candies* is an expression of the innate curiosity that all children possess and their ability to see value in the little things. At the same time, it also makes us think about big life questions and things like loneliness and friendship.

Baek Heena tells us that the medium of the book itself, and the limitations and possibilities of two-dimensional images, are sources of inspiration for her work. Her books can be understood as relating to a long tradition within children's literature that includes dolls and toys. She has revived that tradition in a most original way, developing a completely new and innovative style. She creates her stories by constructing miniature scenes, like stage sets, and populating them with a cast of tiny figurines. She then lights the sets and photographs them. Many of

the characters in her early books were dolls that she made of cardboard, cotton fabric, thread, and buttons. More recently she has begun sculpting her characters from clay, rendering them more animated and plastic and allowing her to produce a wider and more nuanced range of facial expressions and postures.

In her books, everyday life can be turned on its head.

It is a unique way of working that has much in common with the theatre, where backdrops for a story are constructed in paper and cardboard. Once the stage is set and the actors are in their places, readers are welcomed into a captivating world where they can observe moments from the characters' daily lives, including both triumphs and tribulations.

Although her innovative technique is a crucial element of her books, what truly makes Baek Heena unique is her ability to tell a compelling story. Her characters – whether animal or human – have an emotional range that is broad and believable, and her storytelling technique is both welcoming and deeply moving. Her books express both a keen respect for every individual's experiences and inherent worth, and an interest in everyone's needs, feelings, and dreams. Whether she is portraying small children, old people, or animals, all her characters are linked to one another and all of them have value. Baek Heena's picture books are a bold, uncompromising and highly original artistic achievement.

2021

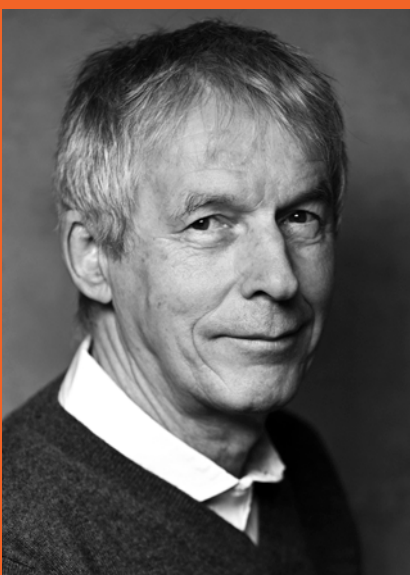
Jean-Claude Mourlevat

The jury's motivation

“Jean-Claude Mourlevat is a brilliant renewer of fairy tale traditions, open to both hardship and beauty. Time and space are suspended in his fictional worlds, and eternal themes of love and longing, vulnerability and war are portrayed in precise and dreamlike prose. Mourlevat’s ever-surprising work pins the fabric of ancient epic onto a contemporary reality.”

“The land where this story begins is inhabited by animals who can walk on their hind legs, talk, borrow books from the library, fall in love, send text messages and go to the hairdresser’s. The neighboring country is home to humans, who are the most intelligent of animals.”

Jean-Claude Mourlevat, *Jefferson* (Andersen Press, 2020)



Jean-Claude Mourlevat (b. 1954) is a French author for children and young adults. Before making his debut as an author in 1997, he was a professional actor and a teacher. His love of literature is a recurring theme in his work. He writes genre-spanning novels of social critique with roots in fairy tale, fable, and fantasy. His books have been translated into nearly 30 languages.

Photo: Susanne Kronholm

Jean-Claude Mourlevat

By Lena Kåreland

Jean-Claude Mourlevat is the first French author ever to receive the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. Being able to celebrate French children's literature in this way feels both exciting and long overdue. But by no means is Mourlevat only a "French" writer. His work transcends national boundaries, and he seems more attracted to the world of fairy tales, ambiguous in both space and time, than to any very clearly defined or faithfully represented reality.

Mourlevat's books tend to be expansive in scope and feature a highly varied cast of characters. For the most part, they belong to a classic storytelling tradition. But Mourlevat also takes liberties with established genres, creating new universes on the outskirts of our own where everyday life is tinged with elements of the fantastic. His stories do not walk well-worn paths; he prefers to surprise us with new and unexpected approaches. For example, he might take a fairy tale such as *Bluebeard* or *Tom Thumb* and let it expand into a grand epic with a timeless and universal quality.

Still, the parallel worlds he creates remain very close to our own. The lines that divide the fantastic from the real are razor-thin. Sometimes, as in the gripping dystopian novel *Terrienne*, a single turn off the main road can bring us face to face with a harrowing shadow world where life exists without laughter or joy, strictly regulated, perfectly efficient, and so sterile that its inhabitants are literally dying of ennui. By contrast, *La balafre* (*The Scar*) offers a window into life in a French village during World War II, a world of racism, informants and anti-Jewish persecution. It is predominantly a work of realism, but even here Mourlevat tests and transcends the limits of the real world.

Mourlevat addresses the big existential questions. He explores love and friendship, life and death, and much like Astrid Lindgren herself, he lets vulnerable children take a leading role. The children in his stories are often lonely and neglected. The adults in

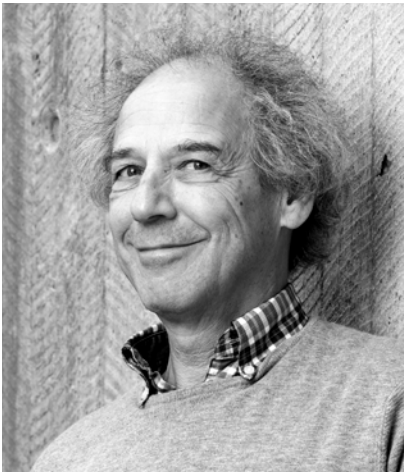
their lives do not take responsibility; they do not measure up, and they let the child characters down. As readers, we are also struck by Mourlevat's ability to express his reflections upon life in prose that flows like music, smoothly and lyrically. Never does he become didactic.

This does not, however, prevent him, in nearly all of his work, from taking a strong stance against violence in every form and mounting a spirited defence of culture and humanism. Among his characters, many of whom are animals, we find devoted bookworms like Jefferson, the highly likeable hedgehog who is a regular visitor at the library. And seldom in children's literature do we see such magnificent libraries as the ones Mourlevat describes in lavish detail. His libraries, the bastions of our collective memory, are more stately than royal palaces.

Another common thread in Mourlevat's books is the fight against oppression and tyranny, something that reminds us at times of Astrid Lindgren's book *The Brothers Lionheart*. The fight can be waged by individuals, as in *The Pull of the Ocean*, or by an entire population, as in *Le chagrin du roi mort* (*The Dead King's Sorrow*) and *Winter's End*. The struggles and tasks given to the protagonists often involve some form of flight. They are forced to pull up roots and go out into the world to fight against evil and for freedom and solidarity.

Thus Mourlevat's narratives are often structured around the journey, the long trek, or the search, all of which take on symbolic meaning. For the young reader, they represent coming of age and crossing the threshold into adulthood. This can be a painful process. But when we pull up roots and leaving things behind, we also open new opportunities and new doors to the future. And in this realisation lie the optimism and sense of hope that in Mourlevat's stories are never very far away.

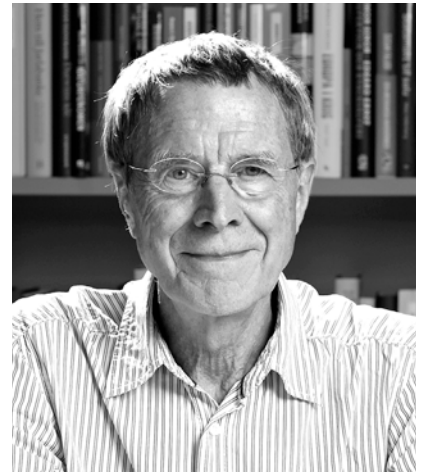
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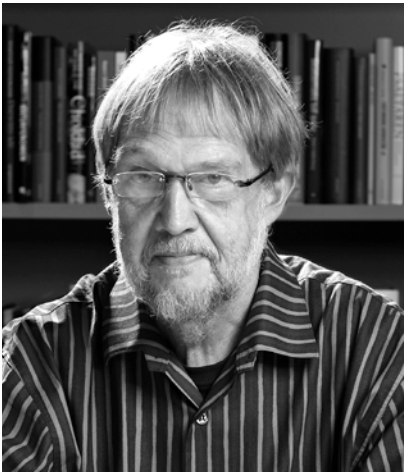
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Baek Heena, page 91
Photo: Susanne Kronholm



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PRAESA, page 71
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Wolf Erlbruch, page 79
Photo: Stefan Tell



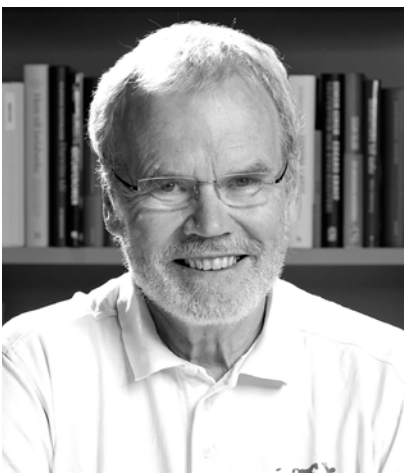
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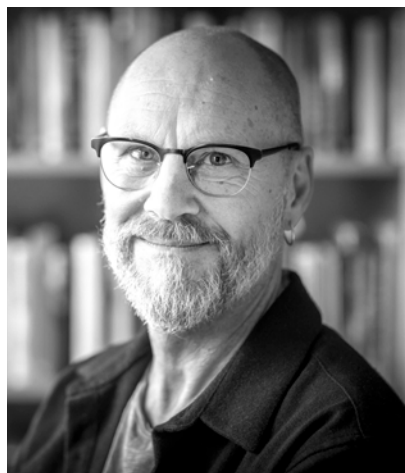
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Barbro Lindgren, page 67
Photo: Susanne Kronholm

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Isol, page 63

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Bart Moeyaert, page 87

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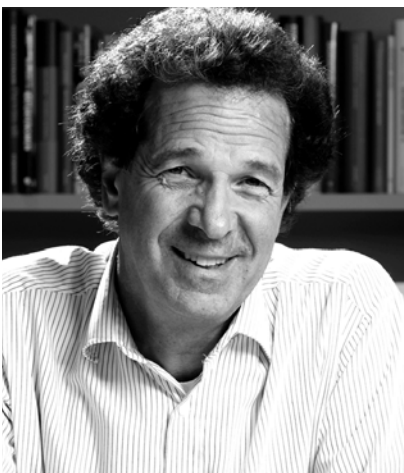
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Jean-Claude Mourlevat, page 95

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Banco del Libro, page 39

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Ryôji Arai, page 31

Photo: Peter Lundvall



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Jacqueline Woodson, page 83

Photo: Stefan Tell



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Stockholm University

Jury member since 2014

Meg Rosoff, page 75

Photo: Susanne Kronholm





LINDGREN
 sagas 46
 4 Sockholm

26.7.1985.

Gud skydde alla sagohungriga små barn för Natur
 och Kulturs läsebok i religionskunskap är det
 av religiösa skäl som grädvärger inte får vara
 grädvärger utan "i verkligheten vanliga stenar
 i skogen"? Och vem är det som tillåter sig en
 så beskäftig för att inte säga enfaldig tolkning?
 Grädvärgarna är - sanna nina ord - de stökaste
 små levande väsen (ehuru fejal) som nånsin har
 skrämt en unge från vettet. Och ingen vuxentolkare
 och ödeläggare ska med mitt goda minne komma och
~~smälla i vidpass 6.000 barn~~
 att "i verkligheten" finns det inga sagor. Rump-
 nissar och vildvitrar och skumtroll, vad är dom
 för nånting "i verkligheten" enligt nyare tolkning?
 "Nånting som du tycker sig se i mörkret men som
 inte finns i verkligheten?" Jag säger som rumpnis-
 sarna: "Voffor gör du på detta viset?"
 Men alltid inte med min text!

Högaktingsfullt
 ad



[Handwritten notes in cursive script, including a signature 'Melins system.' at the bottom.]

Melins system.



Astrid Lindgren

By Johan Palmberg

“Prizes and medals will be accepted on Thursdays between 12 p.m. and 1.30 p.m.”

Astrid Lindgren joked that she would have to put a note like that up on her door during a period in her career when accolades were streaming in from every direction. Her flat on Dalagatan 46 in Stockholm is indeed scattered with numerous awards. She liked to say that she was especially fond of the big statuettes, because they were so good for propping open the windows when she needed to air the place out.

Given the detachment that Lindgren showed toward her own accolades, one might find some irony in the fact that the world’s largest prize for children’s literature now bears her name. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine a more fitting tribute to Lindgren’s life and work than an award that recognises the right of children to access culture and the power of reading to create miracles in their lives.

A respect for children both as readers and as individuals permeated not only Astrid Lindgren’s books, but also her life and advocacy outside of her writing. In such beloved works as *Pippi Longstocking*, *The Brothers Lionheart* and *Ronja the Robber’s Daughter*, she challenged contemporary notions about what children’s literature could be and the topics it was allowed to explore. Seventy-five years after her publishing debut, her books, which eventually reached some 100 in number and are translated into more than 100 languages, continue to both comfort and challenge her readers.

Lindgren made sure to use her platform to draw attention to topics and issues she found important. When she received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, she took her acceptance speech as an opportunity to speak out against the corporal punishment of children, an issue that was then being hotly debated in Sweden. Her words made a difference, as the following year Sweden became the first nation ever to prohibit all forms of violence against children.

“Prizes and medals will
be accepted on Thursdays
between 12 p.m. and
1.30 p.m.”

Once, when Astrid Lindgren was walking in Vasaparken in Stockholm, she was approached by a woman who handed her a note. The note said, “Thank you for brightening a gloomy childhood.” Lindgren revisited that moment many times. “That’s enough for me,” she said. “If I have managed to brighten a single gloomy childhood, I am satisfied.” That spirit lives on in all the fantastic writers, illustrators and reading promoters who have received the award that bears her name (even if their ALMA diplomas make for rather poor window props).





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ANNIVERSARY PUBLICATION

In memory of Astrid Lindgren

Few have done more for the right of children to a rich inner life than Astrid Lindgren. The creator of stories beloved the world over, she was a renewer of children's literature. She was also a steadfast humanist who made her voice heard in the public debate, always with her focus on children and their future. When, in 2002 at the age of 94, her voice finally fell silent, the Swedish Government decided to found an award to honour her memory and to promote interest in children's and young adult literature around the world. The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award is administered by the Swedish Arts Council.

2002–2022