

The 35th IBBY International Congress *Literature in a Multiliterate World*

Auckland, New Zealand, 18 – 21 August 2016

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Kia Ora! This Maori expression for “Welcome!” or “Hello!” is what one is welcomed with in New Zealand. The 35th IBBY World Congress was an entrancing and stimulating gathering of over 500 experts on and enthusiasts of children’s literature from 58 countries around the world. Its organisation was impeccable, and it offered diverse and memorable experiences for everyone involved.

The Auckland setting against the backdrop of New Zealand and Maori culture made our experience all the richer and even more unforgettable. As part of the IBBY UK delegation, I was struck by how completely the indigenous Maori culture and spirit were embedded into New Zealand life. This report deals in equal measure with the proceedings of the IBBY Congress and my first and lasting impressions of this wonderful country.

New Zealand is a modern-day first-world nation with its many successes and challenges. There are big debates on national definitions of identity as well as disturbing reports on child poverty, which were prominently featured in the news while we were there. As a result of recent efforts to promote the Maori heritage and culture, New Zealand has officially become a bilingual country. From immigration halls in airports and tourist information sites to the beautiful inaugural ceremony of the Congress, Maori is used alongside English with ease, pride and a charming matter-of-factness. Along with Maori, there is the surprising (to us) presence of Pacifica cultures and languages: those cherished by the descendants of the Polynesian nations of the Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu and Tokelau. These languages are widely taught through “language nests” or *Kohanga Reo* in a bid to preserve and maintain them. Thus, the very poignant Maori proverb rings true:

Ko taku reo taku ohooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria.

(My language is my awakening; my language is the window to my soul.)

The IBBY experience started the day before the Congress, with a programme of library visits. Tessa Duder, the well-known New Zealand author, was our guide and entertained us with her experiences as a writer and her knowledge of Auckland’s history. The libraries that we saw were exciting, innovative places, thanks to (among other things) their collections, architecture and the technology they use.

The other remarkable visit we made was to the National Library’s Services for Schools section which, rather uniquely, provides a full range of free services to schools throughout New Zealand (<http://schools.natlib.govt.nz>). We wrapped up the day at the new public library at Davenport, which has the most sensational views of the harbour, as well as thoughtful, quirky and cosy reading nooks and window seats, which a reader would be loath to leave at all. In that inviting and beautiful place, Tessa Duder read to us from the much-admired New Zealand author Margaret Mahy and her own work.

The theme of the Congress was *Literature in a Multiliterate World* and the first day’s inaugural ceremony amply demonstrated that New Zealand is a multicultural country, as well as one very welcoming of new and emerging literacies. The emotive welcome included

the *powhiri* (a Maori welcoming ceremony) and the conch horn being blown as traditional dancers sang for us. Speeches were made in both Maori and English, not because there was an international audience, but as an entirely natural practice, a part of the daily, bilingual life of New Zealand. The ceremony closed with the famous “Kapa Haka” (a traditional kind of dancing with dancers standing one next to another in a line) performed by school pupils representing the five Pacifica cultures. The day was split into a number of parallel sessions including three to four presentations each, gathered around the following themes: *Bridging Worlds*, *Targeted Collections*, *The Past Informs the Present: Politics and History*, *Literature through Drama and Dance*, *National Initiatives for Engaging Readers*, and *Landscape in Literature*, with an additional Poster Session including ten short presentations. The only downside was that one had to choose from seven interesting sessions each time.

The keynote speeches reflected on the Congress theme. Witi Ihimaera, Kate De Goldi and Joy Cowley spoke movingly and eloquently on the importance of storytelling, especially the kind that reflects the culture and histories of its audience. This is essential in helping children widen their horizons. Later in the day, in a special keynote panel plenary session provocatively titled *There Is No Such Thing as a Children’s Book*, Leonard Marcus and Julia Eccleshare conversed about what makes a good children’s book and how these books have changed with time. They started with W.H. Auden’s words, “There are good books which are only for adults. There are no good books which are only for children”.

A new set of six sessions plus a poster session followed, in parallel, covering the following topics: *The Past Informs the Present: Conflict*, *Diverse Words and Images*, *Imaginary Worlds*, *Inclusion in Australian Children’s Literature*, *Translation in a Multilingual World*, and *Children’s Literature in Education Conceptual Development*. Rounding off the day’s proceedings was the IBBY Asahi Reading Promotion Awards ceremony, and the winners were the “Read with Me” project from Iran and “Big Brother Mouse” from Laos, the representatives of which made moving presentations about their work. Both these projects are remarkable and offer hope through books to children in dire and heart-breaking situations, which was humbling to hear about.

On the second day, Ghanaian author Meshack Asare started us off with a discussion on indigenous literature and the importance of names and words that sound local, bringing recognition to enchanting myths and legends, thus making them even more steeped in local cultures. Nadia Wheatley, Gavin Bishop and Nahoko Uehashi discussed the issue of cultural diversity in children’s literature in a keynote panel session. Then followed the sharply focused paper presentations lending an analytical edge to the emotional heart of the Congress, titled *Communities of Readers and Writers*, *Engaging Young Readers*, *Engaging Readers and Thinkers*, *Diverse and Engaging*, *Identity in YA Literature*, and *Multimodal Diversity*. Later in the day we watched the IBBY Honour List 2016 presentation, showing all the books that were included, nominated by the member state associations, to which wonderful Maori music was playing in the background (<https://youtu.be/wRpSt6hw1iI>). The book displays and stalls around the expansive conference centre complimented the session and drew in numerous visitors.

The next session of the day titled *Illustration Unbound* was an outstanding visual treat, with illustrators Bronwyn Bancroft, Zak Waipara and Roger Mello, the winner of the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration (2014), speaking to the audience about

their work. Waipara called the picturebook a philosophical medium, like a museum or an art gallery within the covers of a book. Leonard Marcus noted that in a world where artists work for different reading audiences, there is pressure from publishers and distributors to have aspects in books which are generic and universally recognisable so they can fit in any culture. But these picturebook artists, who have a strong sense of place in their works, show us the way to go: they are our windows to the world in its diversity. The session was a profound, moving experience of literature and culture. In parallel, there was another Panel Plenary on *Imagination in an Age of Reason*, with Katherine Paterson, Ursula Dubosarsky and Kate De Goldi.

Lastly, in another pair of parallel plenary sessions, Raina Telgemeier talked about comics, and Australian Children's Laureate Leigh Hobbs lent a touch of celebrity to the proceedings, bringing the house down with his hilarious and moving stories about how he created his famous characters like Horrible Harriet, Old Tom and Mr Chicken.

Day three started early with an interesting "Meet the Author" breakfast with Gavin Bishop and Kate De Goldi. The opening plenary *From Print to Screen* was a spell-binding presentation by writer Martin Baynton and Sir Richard Taylor, co-founder of the Weta Workshop which produces models and puppets used in famous films and TV shows like *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003), *Avatar* (2009), *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2005, 2008) and *King Kong* (2005). It was amazing to see what a small country like New Zealand was achieving in terms of technological success, definitely leading in this area.

The parallel sessions for the morning included another poster session, as well as those comprising presentations on *Teen Voices*, *Multilingual Texts*, *Global Identity*, *Graphic Novels*, *Verse and Diverse World*, and *Storytelling and 'Bookselling'*. After this string of engaging and hard-to-choose-from parallel sessions, came the afternoon plenary by Marcus Zusak, best known for the novel *The Book Thief* (2005), who gave a humorous and poignant personal account of his creative influences. Both his parents were settlers from Europe and great storytellers. Zusak firmly believes that their early stories taught him how to write and he emphasised that our individual stories are our legacy for children to be shared.

The plenary was followed by another set of parallel sessions including the final poster session rounding up the number of posters at the Congress to 40. The topics of the remaining three sessions were focused on global issues and child authors: *Global Perspectives*, *Writing Globally*, and *Children Creating Their Stories*.

The Hans Christian Andersen Awards Dinner – a wonderland of Aboriginal decorations, live music and stimulating food for thought – was held that evening. During this ceremony, in between speeches from distinguished guests, Patricia Aladana, President of the Awards Jury, presented the Award for Writing to Cao Wenxuan. For this Chinese author, writing is a shelter, representing space and time as well as spiritual freedom. He spoke of the magic in writing and words to transpose people into another culture and another's experience. Unfortunately, Rotraut Susanne Berner, winner of the Award for Illustration, was unable to attend, but, happily for us, sent a hilarious animated video as her acceptance.

On the last day we had another keynote by Sir Richard Taylor and Martin Baynton, the IBBY General Assembly, and Tim Bray's adaptation for the stage of Witi Ihimaera's famous novel *The Whale Rider*. During the Congress closing ceremony, Joy Cowley said something that we all felt the truth of:

Haere mai ano hoa, ka waiho ano te utuafare.

(You came as friends and leave as family.)

According to Nahoto Uehashi (Hans Christian Andersen Award winner, 2014), by “simply borrowing the device of the story” we can share the authenticity of indigenous experience, transcend the bounds of other cultures and access a world full of diversity. So, here is to more *mana* (Maori for “prestige and power”) to the IBBY motto of alleviating ignorance through stories, which I find inspiring and enlightening in equal measure. *Kia Ora!*

Soumi Dey

International Conference

A Century of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's Tales of Long Ago

Zagreb, Croatia, 12 – 15 October 2016

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The most famous Croatian collection of fairy tales written by the prominent author Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, *Tales of Long Ago* (*Priče iz davnine*, 1916), celebrated the centenary of its first publication. As the most published and translated Croatian prose collection, *Tales of Long Ago* is certainly a jewel in the crown of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's literary work. What makes the *Tales* so exquisite is an original storyline with motifs taken from Slavic mythology. Confirmation of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's impeccable writing came with four nominations for the world's most respected literary award – the Nobel Prize in Literature. Besides being one of Croatia's most famous nominees for the Nobel Prize in literature, she also played a significant role in Croatian cultural history as the first woman member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. To honour another famous work by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, *The Strange Adventures of Hlapić the Apprentice* (*Čudnovate zgođe šegrta Hlapića*, 1913), the Croatian Association of Researchers in Children's Literature (CARCL) in cooperation with Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Matrix Croatica Unit in Slavonski Brod and several other institutions organised an international conference held in Slavonski Brod (18–20 April 2013): “From the Strange to the Wondrous: 100 Years of *The Strange Adventures of Hlapić the Apprentice*”. The conference held in Slavonski Brod was the first in Croatia entirely dedicated to a single work of children's literature. In this tradition, CARCL, the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and Matrix Croatica organised an international conference to celebrate *Tales of Long Ago*: “A Century of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's *Tales of Long Ago*”, which attracted even more presenters than its predecessor.

The Conference was held under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Mrs. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, in Zagreb, from 12 to 15 October, and took place in the library of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and the halls of Matica hrvatska [Matrix Croatica]. The opening ceremony was held at the National Revival Hall of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. More than 160 participants from many different countries contributed to the Conference with their presentations, which were held in 24 thematic sections. Besides enjoying the Conference, visitors and presenters had the