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Sanja Lovrić Kralj

Meeting Children's Author Julia Donaldson

Zagreb, 20 May 2018

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On 20 May 2018, the Ibis grafika publishing house organised a meet and greet with best-selling children's author Julia Donaldson, held in cooperation with the "Bookara" bookshop, Zagreb.

Known to many as the author of the picturebook *The Gruffalo*, Julia Donaldson is an English author with an abundance of children's books to her name. She also writes poems, songs, plays, and performs live shows. She was the Children's Laureate from 2011 to 2013, during which time she promoted the importance of children acting and reading out loud, advocated the benefits of play-reading for improving reading skills, and stood up against libraries being shut down. Published in 1999, *The Gruffalo* has been one of her most successful books, with over 17 million copies sold worldwide. The event was primarily intended to promote *The Gruffalo* (translated into Croatian in 2004 as *Grubzon*) and with an overall turnout of nearly 100 people (parents and children), it is no wonder that this story about a (supposedly) imaginary monster is often described as a modern classic.



The Gruffalo / Grubzon*

Although the meeting was publicised as a book signing, there was unexpected additional entertainment. Half an hour before Donaldson's scheduled arrival, the bookshop was already brimming with anticipating children and parents alike. Prams were parked outside and excited chatter filled the air. A broad selection of her colourful books was displayed over two tables, including her best-known picturebooks and even several board books for the very youngest. Titles included *Superworm*,

* The photographs are by the author of the text, Sara Sabljak. / Fotografije je snimila autorica teksta, Sara Sabljak.



A song / Pjesma

Zog, Room on the Broom, Stick Man, The Snail and the Whale, and her newest addition *The Ugly Five*. Although the display mostly consisted of Croatian translations, some of the better-known titles could also be found in the original English versions. The majority of the showcased books were masterpieces created in tandem with the brilliant illustrator, Axel Scheffler. The collaboration of the two has resulted in some truly memorable characters, who also made an appearance at the event in the form of plush toys in varying sizes and which were available for purchase. The atmosphere was one any author could only hope for. Even before her arrival, Donaldson's presence could be felt in the room. Young children were sitting on the carpet, flipping through the vivid illustrations, others were resting in their parent's lap, enthralled by the melodic rhymes. Some children even took to playing with the plush toys, acting out little scenarios with the Gruffalo, the little mouse, Zog, and the Witch.

Upon her arrival, Donaldson encouraged the young and old to join her in a song. She called out an unsuspecting father from the audience, who ended up being the Gruffalo for the purpose of the song. Even though the song was in English, the children instinctively joined in, mimicking the actions and echoing the chorus. Although the Croatian translation of *The Gruffalo* alters the name to 'Grubzon,' Donaldson's performance transcended the language barrier. Her husband Malcolm accompanied the song on the acoustic guitar and joined in with the singing. At the end of the song, much to the enjoyment of all children present (and, truth be told, many of their accompanying parents), a life-sized Gruffalo came out from the back of the store. It is a pity the space was not bigger as there were over 50 people at the time



Book signing / Potpisivanje knjiga

crowded into the small bookshop, all trying to catch a glimpse of the Gruffalo.

Once the actual book signing commenced, Donaldson's husband took to the street in front of the bookstore and continued to entertain all the visitors still waiting their turn to come inside. Julia Donaldson engaged with all her visitors, having short conversations with each child or parent eagerly awaiting for their book to be signed. It is truly admirable that even after one hour of signing, her husband was still outside, equally cheerful and singing poems inspired by Donaldson's books, along with other popular children's songs upon request.

This meet and greet proved that Julia Donaldson is not only a fantastic writer but also an entertainer at heart. On her website she explains how she started her career busking with her husband, and that until this day they have both enjoyed performing at book festivals. She and her husband prolonged their stay in Zagreb and performed at the Zagreb Book Festival (21–27 May).

It was a pleasure to meet Julia Donaldson but an even greater one to see the enthusiasm inspired by her books and the love of reading she has managed to pass on to yet another generation of children.

Sara Sabljak

Croatian Children's Books Awards in 2017

Hrvatske nagrade za dječju knjigu u 2017. godini

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Nagrada „Grigor Vitez“ – The “Grigor Vitez” Award

Ana Đokić. 2016. *Bao baobab i mala Kibibi* (ilustrirala/images by Dubravka Kolanović) [Bao the Baobab and the Little Kibibi]. Zagreb: Knjiga u centru. (Tekst za djecu / Category: text for children).

Sanja Pilić. 2016. *Pošalji mi poruku...* [Text me...]. Zagreb: Mozaik knjiga. (Tekst za mladež / Category: text for young adults).

Ana Kadoić. 2016. *Što rade odrasli i Petar i tramvaj* Kašmira Huseinovića [What Adults Do, text by herself, and Peter and the Tram, text by Kašmir Huseinović]. Zagreb: Kašmir promet. (Za ilustracije za mlađu dob djece / Category: illustration for young children).

Marsela Hajdinjak. 2016. *Slavuj* Hansa Christiana Andersena [A Nightingale, text by Hans Christian Andersen]. Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga. (Za ilustracije za stariju dob djece / Category: illustration for older children).

Nagrada „Grigor Vitez“ najstarija je nagrada za dječju knjigu u Hrvatskoj. Dodjeljuje se od 1967. godine u Zagrebu. Osnivač je i pokrovitelj nagrade Savez društava „Naša djeca“ Hrvatske. Dodjeljuje se za najbolji tekst i ilustracije iz jednogodišnje produkcije dječje knjige u Hrvatskoj. Sastoji se od diplome, statue „Ptica“ akademske kiparice Ksenije Kantoci i novčanoga iznosa.

Grigor Vitez (1911–1966) was a Croatian children's poet, translator and editor of children's books. Founded in 1967 in Zagreb by the Union of Societies “Our Children”, Croatia, the “Grigor Vitez” Award is the oldest children's book award in Croatia. The best literary text and illustrations selected from Croatia's annual production of