



Hans Christian Andersen Award 2020

ISABELLE ARSENAULT

**Illustrator Nominee
(Canada)**

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Statement of Contribution to Children’s Literature.....	4
Biography of Isabelle Arsenault.....	7
10 Most Important Titles.....	8
Most Significant Titles.....	9
Migrant (2011).....	10
Reviews.....	10
Awards & Accolades.....	11
Foreign Rights & Translations.....	11
Virginia Wolf (2012).....	12
Reviews.....	12
Awards & Accolades.....	13
Foreign Rights & Translations.....	13
Jane, le renard & moi (2012).....	14
Reviews.....	14
Awards & Accolades.....	15
Foreign Rights & Translations.....	16
Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois (2016).....	17
Reviews.....	17
Awards & Accolades.....	19
Foreign Rights & Translations.....	19
Colette’s Lost Pet (2017).....	20
Reviews.....	20
Awards & Accolades.....	21
Foreign Rights & Translations.....	22
On Isabelle Arsenault.....	23
Complete Bibliography.....	29
Other Awards & Accolades.....	30
Other Foreign Rights & Translations.....	33

Introduction

The Hans Christian Andersen Nominating Committee of IBBY Canada is pleased and honoured to introduce Isabelle Arsenault as the illustrator we have selected for consideration by the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Jury.

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

While studying Fine Arts and Graphic Design at the Université du Québec à Montréal, Arsenault discovered her passion for illustration. Her skills were quickly recognized among her peers, and she soon gained an international reputation, as attested by the translations listed in this dossier and the books she is illustrating for writers from France and the US. With seventeen illustrated books now to her name, Arsenault has won many awards and earned many distinctions, including being a three-time winner of the prestigious Canadian Governor General’s Award for Children’s Literature (*Le cœur de monsieur Gauguin*, 2004; *Virginia Wolf*, 2012; *Jane, le renard & moi*, 2012). Both *Migrant* (2011) and *Jane, the Fox & Me* (2013), the English translation of *Jane, le renard & moi*, were on *The New York Times* “Ten Best Illustrated Books” for their respective years. *Jane, le renard & moi* was recommended by the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen Jury as one of fifteen outstanding works that merit translation everywhere. *Cloth Lullaby* won the Bologna Ragazzi Award for art books in 2017.

Arsenault’s diverse output is a direct result of her creative process: “I approach each of my books in a different way. Each text invokes a particular universe, and I endeavour to grasp it by adapting my techniques, my renderings and my graphical approach to each project.” The reviews and other accolades included in this dossier confirm that her flexibility as an illustrator of diverse publications has garnered her a wide-ranging audience. She has recently moved into writing with *Colette’s Lost Pet*, although as she said in an interview with Sandra O’Brien, she enjoys being “inspired by the words of others, since they bring me to new places, to worlds other than mine.” Her illustrations, while immediately accessible, leave a lasting impression achieved only through their subtle undercurrents. She has that uncanny ability to tap into her childhood dreams and imaginings and into the minds of her subjects, from artists living on the edge of society – such as Emily Dickinson, Paul Gauguin, Virginia Woolf, and Louise Bourgeois – to displaced children like Rosalie, Hélène, and Jane Eyre, the Mexican migrant Anna, and the hybrid Spork. She then renders her characters’ inner landscapes with the skills of a consummate artist so that they elicit a strong empathic response from young and old alike.

IBBY Canada is honoured to nominate Isabelle Arsenault for the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award. Her exceptional contribution to the literary and artistic heritage of children’s literature in Canada and internationally makes her a deserving and outstanding candidate.

Lesley D. Clement, PhD



IBBY Canada, Regional Councillor Ontario
Co-Chair HCA Nomination Committee
January 2019

Robert Bittner, PhD



IBBY Canada, Regional Councillor West
Co-Chair HCA Nomination Committee
January 2019



Statement of Contribution to Children's Literature

Submitted by Professor Perry Nodelman

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

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

This subtle transformation is another example of the economy of Arsenault's work — the ways in which a few simple brush strokes can convey not only a radical change in a character's state of mind but also the nature of that state of mind, the complex thoughts and emotions that it consists of. One particularly significant aspect of Arsenault's economy and the ways in which she marshals it in order to depict and engage complex responses is her use of colour. While most of her images are primarily monochromatic — usually black and/or brown — she often includes just one or two figures in another colour. In her illustrations for her own text in *Colette's Lost Pet* (2017), she carefully orchestrates the presence of yellow and blue objects in otherwise brown and black landscapes in order to reveal what in Colette's actual environment she has chosen to transform into the blue and yellow parakeet she imagines. But Arsenault also implies a complex emotional scenario when the "Fragile" label on the box Colette angrily kicks after her mother denies her wish for a pet is the first appearance of yellow in the book after her own yellow coat, thus implying a connection between the girl and fragility. What, then, is the emotional import of Colette transforming the drab bird, which emerges from the box and flies off, into an imaginary parakeet with a bit of yellow on its neck? The shape of that yellow spot makes it, too, look much like the yellow-cloaked Colette herself in the monochrome world around her, especially in the final image of Colette happily returning home after

her ability to imagine the parrot has made her a group of new friends as a yellow object in a world now no longer unhappily grey, but as blue as the parrot and the flowers she based it on.

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

The shapes of the boughs of those joyful trees echo shapes that appear a few pages earlier, as speech balloons emanating from H  l  ne's new friend's mouth — an ingenious way of implying how this new friend transforms H  l  ne's world. Likewise, in *Cloth Lullaby*, the flower Louise draws in her notebook keeps growing beyond the page and joins the other flowers in the garden she is observing. Later in the book, when a similarly shaped and coloured flower appears in the "cloth lullaby" that the text tells us she weaves of "everything she ever loved," it echoes both the shapes and colours of the musical notes in the lullaby's musical score and of the balls of wool her mother is seen weaving on the same page. Indeed, one of those balls and a number of similar depictions of flowers intermingle with the joyful notes of the sheet music to create a lullaby that harmoniously ties together images found throughout the book.

Arsenault's body of work contains books intended for the entire range of young readers: the beginners usually envisaged as the audience for alphabet books (*Alpha* [2014], her depictions of objects suggested by the NATO phonetic alphabet); youngsters being read poems by adults and then beginning to read them on their own (Gilles Tibo's *R  ves d'enfance* [2007], *My Letter to the World and Other Poems* [2008]); school-age children who might be of an age to identify with Anna of *Migrant*, Vanessa and Virginia of *Virginia Wolf*, or Colette of *Colette's Lost Pet*; older children and teenagers who might identify with H  l  ne of *Jane, the Fox & Me* — not to mention adult aficionados of graphic novels. But it is evidence of Arsenault's astute balance of the simple and complex that all these books might well find readers across a wide range of ages.

Older readers who know something about Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, and the Bloomsbury group might take pleasure in making connections between those real people and the characters Kyo Maclear imagines and Arsenault brings to life in *Virginia Wolf*. But Maclear's characters and Arsenault's images require no such knowledge. They allow both simpler and less informed readings and more complex and more knowledgeable ones. Furthermore, I suspect that the simpler responses will nevertheless include a pleasurable sense of something more that is yet to be explored and discovered. Arsenault's trust in young readers allows her to suggest the satisfactions of a larger world of reference and potentially allows them access to it. More immediately, the "Author's Note" at the end of *Cloth Lullaby* gives readers the opportunity both to explore how the events depicted in the story preceding it refer to and imply a larger and more complex set of events, and also offers them the information that can reveal how what came earlier is not only complete in itself but wonderfully suggestive of something larger.

At the other end of the spectrum, similarly, *Alpha* allows both simple responses to the object depicted and a more complex awareness of the cleverness of the relationships between the word on each page and the image

accompanying it; between, say, the word “Delta” and the image of a triangular paper airplane that both echoes the shape of the Greek letter delta and evokes the name of an American airline; or between the word “Oscar” and a picture of the sort of ball gown a woman might wear to the Academy Awards. And once more, young readers unaware of what the Oscars are might well be pleased to learn from an adult sharing the experience of reading *Alpha* why a ball gown evokes them.

The range of the audience that Arsenault’s work appeals to transcends geographic borders as well as categories of age. Not only have Arsenault’s Québécois French-language texts often been re-published in English for English-speaking Canadians, but they have also been translated into over fifteen other languages. Recently, she has extended into the European market with Timothée de Fombelle’s *Captaine Rosalie/Captain Rosalie* (2018, Gallimard/Walker). As distinctive as her style is, and despite or even because it is so grounded in times and places as specific as her depiction of her own Montreal neighbourhood in *Colette’s Lost Pet*, her work speaks to an international audience.

Sincerely,

Perry Nodelman



Professor Emeritus
University of Winnipeg
January 2019



Biography of Isabelle Arsenault



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

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

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

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

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

In 2005, Arsenault won the prestigious Governor General’s Literary Award for the illustration of her first children’s book, *Le cœur de monsieur Gauguin* (2004). She has gone on to win the Governor General’s Literary Award for illustrated books two more times for *Virginia Wolf* (2012) and the graphic novel *Jane, le renard & moi* (2012) for which she also won the Joe Shuster Award for Outstanding Artist. This graphic novel was also recommended by the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen jury as one of fifteen outstanding works that “merit translation everywhere.” Two of her picture books – *Migrant* (2011) and *Jane, the Fox & Me* – were named as *New York Times* Best Illustrated Books of the Year. *Louis parmi les spectres*, the second graphic novel that she created with Fanny Britt, won IBBY Canada’s Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award. In 2017, *Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois* won the Bologna Ragazzi Award for a children’s book on art and artists.

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

Isabelle Arsenault lives in Montreal, Quebec with her family.



Ten Most Important Titles

Le cœur de monsieur Gagnon [Mr. Gauguin's Heart]

Text by Marie-Danielle Croteau

(Montréal: Éditions les 400 coups, 2004)

My Letter to the World and Other Poems

Poems by Emily Dickinson

(Toronto: Kids Can Press, 2008)

Migrant

Text by Maxine Trottier

(Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2011)

Jane, le renard & moi

Text by Fanny Britt

(Montreal: Éditions de la Pastèque, 2012)

Virginia Wolf

Text by Kyo Maclear

(Toronto: Kids Can Press, 2012)

Once Upon a Northern Night

Text by Jean E. Pendziwol

(Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2013)

Spork

Text by Kyo Maclear

(Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2013)

Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois

Text by Amy Novesky

(New York: Abrams, 2016)

You Belong Here

Text by M.H. Clark

(Seattle: Compendium Books, 2016)

Colette's Lost Pet

Text by Isabelle Arsenault

(Toronto: Tundra, 2017)



Most Significant Titles

Migrant

(Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2011)

Virginia Wolf

(Toronto: Kids Can Press, 2012)

Jane, le renard & moi

(Montreal: Éditions de la Pastèque, 2012)

Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois

(New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2016)

Colette's Lost Pet

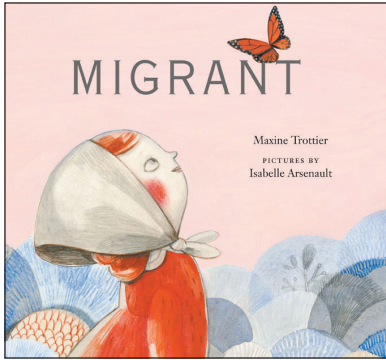
(Toronto: Tundra Books, 2017)



Migrant (2011)

Reviews

School Library Journal (Maggie Chase)



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

Brainpickings (Maria Popova)

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Awards & Accolades

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

American Library Association’s Notable Children’s Books

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

Notable Books for a Global Society Book Award, 2012

The New York Times Best Illustrated, 2011

USBBY Outstanding International Book, 2012

Shortlisted for:

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

Annual ReadBoston Best Read Aloud Book Award, 2012

Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children’s Book Award, 2012

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

Quill & Quire, STARRED REVIEW

Foreign Rights & Translations

Complex Chinese: WordField Publishing Ltd.

Greek: Livani Publishing Organization

Japan: Nishimura Co., Ltd.

Korea: Sanha Publishing Co.

North America (English): Groundwood Books

Spanish (Mexico): Artes de México

Spanish (Spain and Argentina): Planeta DeAgostini



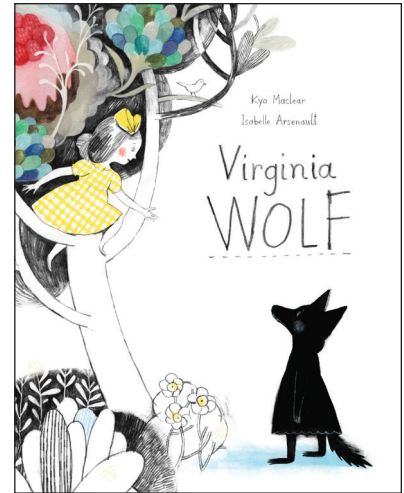
Virginia Wolf (2012)

Reviews

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

Awards & Accolades

Best Bets, Picture Books, Ontario Library Association

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

Books of the Year, *Quill & Quire*

Brainpickings (Maria Popova), The [10] Best Illustrated Children’s Books and Picture Books of 2012

CCBC Choices, Cooperative Children’s Book Center, Commended

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

Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award, IBBY Canada

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

IBBY Honour List – Illustration

USBBY Outstanding International Book

White Raven Award, International Youth Library

Shortlisted for:

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

Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award

Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children’s Book Award

TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award



“It is the delicacy of the mixed-media illustrations (ink, pencil, watercolor, gouache) that tames the ferocious Virginia and gives real strength to the story. Parents will enjoy sharing this book with their sometimes ‘wolfish’ children.” — *School Library Journal*, STARRED REVIEW

Foreign Rights & Translations

Canada (French World): Éditions
de la Pastèque

Brazil (Portuguese): Grupo SM Brasil

Chinese (Complex): WordField
Publishing Co.

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

Dutch: Uitgeverij De Eenhoorn

Italian: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A.

Japanese: Kijiora Publishing Inc.

Korean: Sanha Publishing Co.

Persian: Fatemi Publishing Co.

Slovenia: ZALA, Založništvo in
izobrazevanje

Spanish: Ediciones Jaguar

Spanish (ePub): La Bestia Equilatera SRL

Turkish: TEAS YAYINCILIK A.S.

United Kingdom, Australia and New

Zealand (English): Book Island Limited

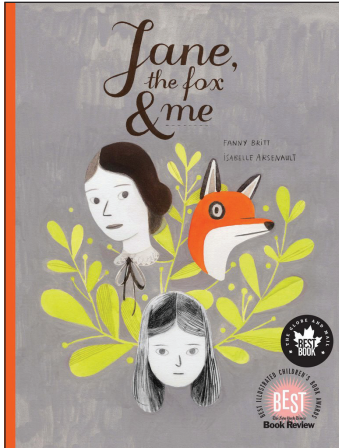
World English (excl. UK, AUS, NZ):

Kids Can Press

Jane, le renard & moi (2012)

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

***Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* (Karen Coats), STARRED REVIEW**



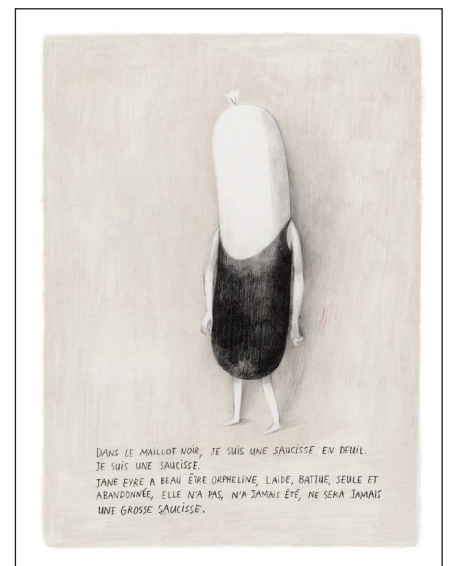
Combining picture-book size and style with graphic-novel narrative sensibility, this elegant Canadian import chronicles the experiences of H el ene, a sensitive junior-high outcast shunned and bullied by girls who were once her friends. She takes refuge in her reading of *Jane Eyre*, hoping that she,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

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

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

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

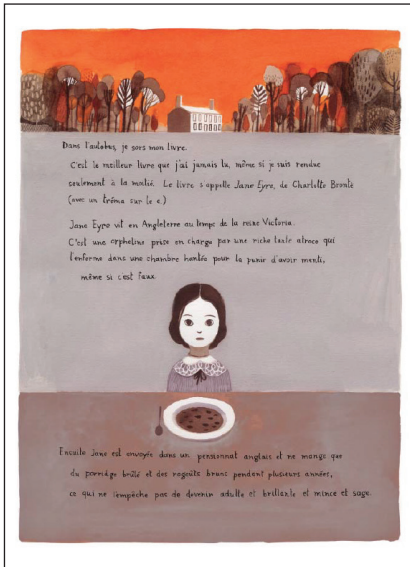
We are in Canada in the 1980s (or so I'm guessing: the boys in the book like to listen to records by the Police while eating copious amounts of liquorice). At school in Quebec, Helene finds herself an outcast. Her enemies, a regular bunch of mean girls, taunt her in the playground and on the bus home,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



DANS LE MAILLOT NOIR, JE SUIS UNE SAUCISSE EN DEHIL.
JE SUIS UNE SAUCISSE.
JANE EYRE A BEAU  TRE ORPHELIVE, LAIDE, BATTUE, SEULE ET
ABANDONN E, ELLE N'A PAS, N'A JAMAIS  T E, NE SERA JAMAIS
UNE GROSSE SAUCISSE.

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

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



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

Geraldine has a remarkable effect on Helene and the other outcasts. Garrulous and open-hearted, she's able to bond with them, with the result that they're at last able to bond with each other (before, they were separated by an awkwardness born of knowing they were touched with the same contagion). On Helene's return to Quebec, the attentive reader will now notice the odd blaze of colour in the monochrome landscape and, sure enough, the book ends

with an epiphany, the paralysing beam of the bullies' searchlight having at last moved on. "You'll see, the story ends well," she tells Geraldine, pressing *Jane Eyre* on her new friend – a baton now, as well as a shield.

Awards & Accolades

Angoulême – Prix jeunesse

Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Books of the Year

Best American Comics

Best Bets 2014, Ontario Library Association

Best Books for Kids & Teens starred selection,

Canadian Children's Book Centre

The Globe and Mail Best Books 2013

Governor General's Literary Award for Illustration,

Canada Council of the Arts

Grand Prix Lux for Illustration

IBBY Honour List – French to English translation

Joe Shuster Award – Outstanding Artist

New York Public Library Books for Reading and Sharing

The New York Times Best Illustrated Books 2013

Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)

Great Graphic Novels for Teens

Prix Réal-Fillion



Shortlisted for:

Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award, Canadian Library Association
Arkansas Teen Book Award
Eisner Award for Best Publication for Kids
English translation: *Jane, the fox & me*
Libris Award for Young Readers Book of the Year, Retail Council of Canada
Pépites 2013 du Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse de Montreuil – Pré-selection
Prix du livre jeunesse des Bibliothèques de Montréal
Prix TD de littérature canadienne pour l'enfance et la jeunesse
Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award
Rocky Mountain Book Award (Alberta)



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

— *School Library Journal*, STARRED REVIEW

“Written by Fanny Britt and illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault — who also gave us the magnificent *Virginia Wolf*, one of the best children’s books of 2012 — this masterpiece of storytelling is as emotionally honest and psychologically insightful as it is graphically stunning. What makes the visual narrative especially enchanting is that Hélène’s black-and-white world of daily sorrow springs to life in full color whenever she escapes with Brontë.”

— Maria Popova (*Brainpickings*)

“Arsenault uses varied page layouts and a mix of illustrative techniques to pace the story and express emotion; monochromatic sketches depict Hélène’s unhappy existence as well as surreal scenes that reflect her feelings, while pages in warm colors relate Jane’s story.”

— Cynthia K. Ritter, *Horn Book*, STARRED REVIEW

“Like so many loners before her, Hélène finds refuge in a book. Hers is ‘Jane Eyre,’ and when Hélène discusses the book, the magnificent, deeply sad illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault (the winner of a New York Times Best Illustrated Children’s Books award for ‘Migrant’) go from stark, wintry colors to bold vermilion and blush rose.”

— Taffy Brodesser-Akner (*New York Times Book Review*)

Foreign Rights & Translations

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque
China (Chinese Complex): Wordfield Publishing
China (Chinese Simplified): Beijing Total
Vision Culture Spread Co.
Germany: Reprodukt
Holland: Reprodukt
Italy: Mondadori Editore
Japan: Nishimura Co.
Korea: Bookbean Publishing
North America (English): Greenwood Books

Poland: Kultura Gniewu
Portugual: WMF Martins Fontes
Russia: Albus Corvus Publishing House
Slovakia: Vydavateľstvo E.J. / E.J. Publishing
Spain: Salamandra
Sweden: Sanatorium Forlag
United Kingdom: Walker Books

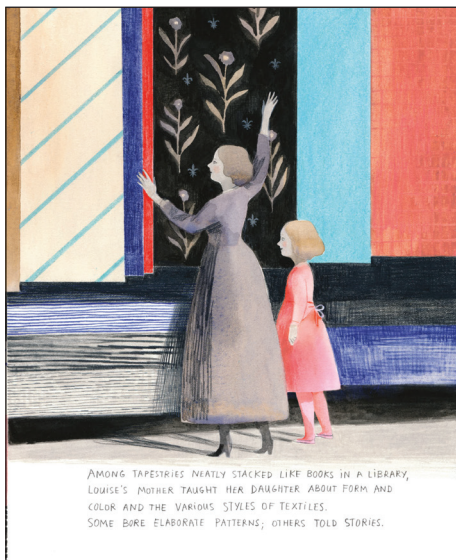
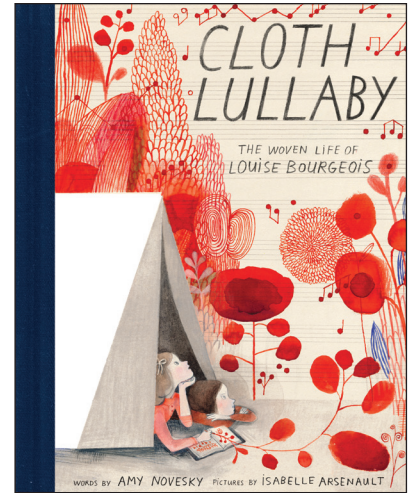
Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois (2016)

Reviews

New York Times Book Review (Maria Popova)

In her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Pearl S. Buck distinguished between the impulse to produce and the impulse to create, which she described as “an enormous extra vitality, a super-energy, born inexplicably in an individual.” Four new books celebrate the inner life of that creative vitality — a wonderful vaccine against our culture’s pathology of deadening productivity.

“Cloth Lullaby” honors the influential French-American artist Louise Bourgeois, nicknamed “Spiderwoman” for her large-scale spider sculptures. The lyrical story begins with Bourgeois’s early life in a family that restored tapestries for a living. (Fittingly, the book is bound with a vibrant ultramarine fabric spine.) In this act of repairing broken threads, Bourgeois came to see her mother as a patient, loving spider. Amy Novesky captures the young girl’s expansive interiority: “Louise would study the web of stars, imagine her place in the universe, and weep, then fall asleep to the rhythmic rock and murmur of river water.”



This poetic tone follows Bourgeois as she migrates to Paris to study mathematics and cosmography. Devastated by her mother’s sudden death, she pivots from the illusory certainty of science to the guaranteed uncertainty of art. So begins her lifelong quest to render tangible her mother’s loving spirit.

Novesky’s writing is alert to young readers’ voracious appetite for the aliveness of language. The story is strewn with beautiful, pleasantly challenging words (“indigo,” “fragments,” “trousseau”), words that have earned the right to make themselves at home in a child’s imagination. Isabelle Arsenault — a master of expressive subtlety and one of the most exceptional illustrators of our time — offers the perfect visual counterpart to that aliveness, rich in consummate patterns and a regal palette of blues and reds.

My only lament: The story glosses over Bourgeois’s lifelong choler at her father. Even if young readers are understandably spared its main source — the formative trauma of discovering his affair with her governess — its emotional aftermath undergirds her autobiographical art. The artificial sweetening of luminaries’ lives does a disservice to creative culture, and to the mythos of success we instill in the young. Yes, life is difficult and messy, but transmuting trauma into art seeds so many great artists’ creative restlessness. Indeed, late in life Bourgeois wrote in her diary: “To be an artist is a guarantee to your fellow humans that the wear and tear of living will not let you become a murderer.” Still, “Cloth Lullaby” is one of the loveliest picture books I’ve encountered — a tender homage to an extraordinary woman.

***Illustrators Illustrated* (Anna Ridley, Commissioning & Development Editor, Children’s Publishing at Thames & Hudson, and founder of Look/Book)**

Amy Novesky’s nuanced text paired with Isabelle Arsenault’s rich illustrations are a stunning way of introducing children to the distinct visual vocabulary of French-born artist Louise Bourgeois.

In the recent past, books about art and artists for children were worthy but dull offerings that tried to take the ideas of some of the world’s most creative thinkers and simplify them beyond recognition. Now, with art publishers and trade publishers alike embracing beautifully illustrated books as a way of inspiring children to engage with the visual arts, we are seeing increasing numbers of exciting art books for children. *Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois* is no exception: it is a stunning and beautiful book that conveys some of what Louise Bourgeois’ life and work was about by expressing it creatively, using both the textual and visual vocabularies the artist used herself.

On first reading, *Cloth Lullaby* will seem very ‘grown-up’ to some. Amy Novesky has written a poetic prose that is sophisticated and nuanced like art itself, and instead of dumbing down, she provides young readers with a step up into the mysterious world of being an artist. The story provides a broad sweep of Bourgeois’ life and hones in on two particular themes that young readers will relate to: the mother / child relationship, which Louise Bourgeois was fascinated by throughout her lifetime; and the idea of weaving or creating artworks to make sense of the world around us. As poetic as it may be, Novesky’s text is evidently informed and well-researched, and she doesn’t shy away from using precise vocabulary. In this sense, the book expects a level of inquisitiveness from its readers whose minds will be tickled by technical terms relating to textile weaving as well as quotes from Bourgeois’ own writings, and will appeal to children, teenagers and adults alike.

Isabelle Arsenault’s illustrations have a visceral effect and immediately immerse the reader in the world of Louise Bourgeois. Drawing predominantly on Bourgeois’ drawings and textile works, Arsenault demonstrates how visuals can be expressive, communicative and representative of ideas that in some aspects are too ambiguous to explain in words. Arsenault’s wave-like illustration in blue ink based on *Throbbing Pulse*, 1944, at once represents the ebb and flow of the river Bourgeois lived by as a child; the soothing effect that drawing abstract, geometric patterns had on her; it acts as a symbol of water, which for the artist represented the unconscious mind; while also familiarising readers with Bourgeois’ distinct visual vocabulary.

Cloth Lullaby is a highly memorable reading experience that young readers will be able to draw on in years to come when they discover Louise Bourgeois’ work for themselves. Novesky’s rich vocabulary paired with Arsenault’s exquisite illustrations make for an intelligent and inspiring celebration of the life and art of one of the world’s most original modern artists.



Awards & Accolades

Winner of the Bologna Ragazzi Award for Art, 2017

Kirkus Best Book of the Year 2016

Junior Library Guild selection

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

— *Kirkus*, STARRED REVIEW

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

— *Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

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

— *Horn Book*, STARRED REVIEW

“a crowning curio among the loveliest picture-books celebrating cultural icons — writer Amy Novesky and illustrator Isabelle Arsenault trace the thread of Bourgeois’s creative development from the formative years of her unusual childhood to the pinnacle of her success as an artist.”

— *Brainpickings*, The Best Children’s Books of 2016

Foreign Rights & Translations

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque

China: Walkers Cultural (Complex Chinese); Citic (Simplified Chinese)

Germany: Seemann Henschel

Iceland: Litli Saeheturinn

Italian: Mondadori

Japan: Nishimura Shoten

Korea: Seedbook Co. Ltd

North America (English): Abrams Books

Spain (Spanish and Catalan): Impedimenta



Colette's Lost Pet (2017)

Reviews

New York Times Book Review (Tom Lichtenheld)



I admire picture books that address challenging themes. Four new pet stories take on the big ones: loss, and even mortality. Though not all the pets in these books pass away — one is unjustly separated from its young owner, and another apparently goes missing without, it turns out, ever existing — all of the stories dip a pinkie toe into the emotional pool of loss without being morose or preachy. It's not easy territory, but we have skillful book creators to help our younger kids explore it with imagination, humor and hope. ...

In “Colette’s Lost Pet” by Isabelle Arsenault (“Cloth Lullaby”; “Jane, the Fox and Me”), Colette has no pet — lost, dead or otherwise — but she sure has an imagination. This graphic-novel-style picture book celebrates the communal instincts of children and the healing power of storytelling. It opens as Colette, new to the neighborhood, is dealt a double whammy

by one of her parents: (1) No, you cannot have a pet, and (2) Go explore your new neighborhood. When timid Colette meets some friendly children who ask the usual new-kid questions, she masks her shyness with a fib about a lost pet parakeet, prompting more questions and offers to help find her bird. The search party takes off, enlisting helpers along the way while Colette’s imagination fills in details about the missing pet: It’s blue and yellow. Its name is Marie-Antoinette. It purrs. No, wait, it talks a little, but only in French. As Colette’s crew grows, so does the parakeet. “She’s gained some weight lately ... so I had to get a bigger cage, and then a bigger house,” she explains.

Before being called home for dinner, Colette finishes up with a whopper about riding Marie-Antoinette around the world. This inspires the other kids to put their own spin on Colette’s story, offering that the bird might draw pictures, play soccer or even tap dance. They know Colette made up the whole thing, and they want to play along.

Where adults might see deception, kids see collaborative storytelling. It’s all made more magical with illustrations that combine a Matisse-like celebration of nature with the playfulness of Chagall. Although the book’s smallish size (7½ by 9½ inches) cramps the story a bit, it’s huge in spirit. Arsenault continues to teach us about children while advancing the art of books created for them.



***National Reading Campaign Children’s Book Reviews* (Linda Ludke)**

Colette’s Lost Pet, written and illustrated by three-time Governor General’s Literary Award winner Isabelle Arsenault, is a beguiling picture book about friendship and imagination. Having just moved to Montreal’s Mile End neighbourhood, Colette is bored, lonely, and frustrated that her parents won’t let her get a pet. When she meets some kids, out of nervousness, she tells a little fib about looking for a lost bird. Soon an enthusiastic search party comes to her aid. Colette keeps the conversation going by spinning a tall tale about her parakeet Marie-Antoinette, who speaks French, surfs, and travels the world. The invented yarn is stretched to outlandishly funny, fantastical proportions. Colette’s new pals probably know that she is making everything up, but they wholeheartedly enjoy the imaginative, “truly amazing” adventures she takes them on, and can’t wait to “explore the jungle” tomorrow.

Isabelle Arsenault’s exquisite, fine-lined pencil and ink illustrations are both subtle and striking. Sporting a sunny yellow raincoat, with the hood tied in place with a bow under her chin, Colette stands out on the black and white pages. Her sweet vulnerability comes across in her initially timid stance, with downcast eyes and reddening cheeks. Colette’s make-believe storytelling is not deviously deceitful – it builds a sense of community and togetherness. This nuanced new-kid-on-the-block tale sparkles with warmth and grace.

Awards & Accolades

A *Quill & Quire* Best Kids’ Book of the Year (2017)
A New York Public Library Best Book for Kids pick
A *Booklist* Editor’s Choice pick
Starred in CCBC’s *Best Books for Kids & Teens* (2017)



“Arsenault crafts a story rooted in themes of understanding, empathy, and the way imagination can be used to silently conspire and inspire.”

— *Quill & Quire*, STARRED REVIEW

“Arsenault’s beautiful, smudgy, scratchy scenes, rendered in soft grays with pops of bright yellow and pale blue, feature big-eyed, adorable kids earnestly searching for the imaginary bird, which is rendered relatively realistically, even as it grows to gargantuan proportions in Colette’s story. With a graphic-novel-like format, arresting artwork, and a story that will ring true to many little kids with big imaginations of their own, this warm, funny picture book hits all the right notes.”

— *Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

“Arsenault’s illustrations are done in black on white with bursts of bright yellow and occasional washes of pale blue, using pencil, watercolor, and ink in various textures to form a sweet style reminiscent of vintage illustrators Cynthia Amrine and Bill Sokol. Arsenault’s story has the feel of a campfire song, increasingly fun and outrageous until the joyful end and its promise of new friendships.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

“The boundary between picture book and comic is delightfully blurred in this sensitive story about a girl with a yellow raincoat and a fictional lost pet.”

— *National Post*



“Arsenault’s drawings, in grays, blacks, yellows and a bit of light blue, are sweet but not saccharine, and the hand-lettered text is relaxed and inviting—much like the entire story. Delightful.”

— *BookPage*

“Isabelle Arsenault has created a memorable young protagonist who will charm readers with her vivid imagination and dynamic spirit. As Colette explores the back lanes of her new community while wearing her bright yellow raincoat, she certainly leaves an impression on the children she meets. Reflecting a culturally diverse population, these young problem solvers unite to make her feel welcome.”

— *Canadian Children’s Book News*

“From the opening pages of the charming urban tale Colette’s *Lost Pet*, we are drawn into a bird’s-eye view of the back alleys of Montreal’s Mile End neighbourhood. The rectangular garden spaces that line the alleyways are as unique and diverse as its population. ... It’s impossible not to love little Colette in her bright yellow hooded jacket.... Arsenault manages to make sure everyone in Colette’s *Lost Pet* lives happily ever after, while also reminding readers that when it comes to sharing imaginary worlds, it’s more fun when everyone plays along.”

— *Montreal Review of Books*

“It’s not Colette’s behavior that Arsenault holds up as exemplary, but that of her new friends. They welcome Colette and don’t shame her for making up stories that they understand come from nervousness. Most fibbing stories end with an abashed moment of coming clean; this one ends with a request for more make-believe.”

— *Publishers Weekly*

“This charming tale demonstrates to kids a lovely and welcoming way to treat someone new in their community.”

— *City Parent*

Foreign Rights & Translations

Chinese (Complex): WordField Publishing Ltd.
 Chinese (Simplified): Beijing Tianlue Books Co, Ltd.
 Canada (French World): La Pastèque
 Italian: Mondadori Libri Italy

Japanese: Kaiesei-Sha Publishing Company
 Korean: Sanha Publishing Co.
 Russian: Mann, Ivanov & Ferber
 Swedish: Bokforlaget Opal AB

On Isabelle Arsenault

Dickinson and the Visual Arts

Emily and Isabelle: Beyond Time

Maryanne Garbowsky, *International Society Bulletin*, 2009

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Louis parmi les spectres: d'innocence et de lucidité

Caroline Décoste, Voir, 2016 (Translation below)

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Louis parmi les spectres: Innocence and Lucidity

Caroline Décoste, Voir, November 2016

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Translation: Josiane Polidori





Complete Bibliography

2004

Le cœur de monsieur Gauguin

Picture book

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

2006

Pas sérieux

Illustrated, adult

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

2008

My Letter to the World and Other Poems

Poetry

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

2010

La caja de los recuerdos

Picture book

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

Bonjour les hirondelles

Picture book

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

Spork

Picture book

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

2011

Migrant

Picture book

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

2012

Virginia Wolf

Picture book

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

Jane, le renard & moi

Graphic novel

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

2013

Once Upon a Northern Night

Picture book

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

2014

Alpha

Alphabet book

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

2016

Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois

Picture book

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

You Belong Here

Picture book

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

Louis parmi les spectres

Graphic novel

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

2017

Colette's Lost Pet

Picture book

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

2018

The Honey Bee

Picture book

Text by Kristen Hall, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault
Atheneum Books for Young Readers: New York, United States

Capitaine Rosalie

Picture book

Text by Timothée de Fombelle, Illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault
Gallimard Jeunesse: Paris, France

2019

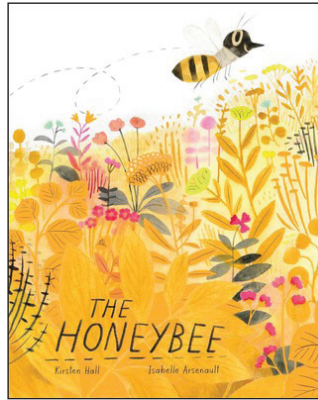
Albert's Quiet Quest

Picture book

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



Other Awards & Accolades



The Honey Bee

“Kirsten Hall (‘The Jacket’) teams up with the gently magnificent illustrator Isabelle Arsenault (‘Cloth Lullaby,’ ‘Colette’s Lost Pet’) to bring readers the story of one year, from spring to spring, with the honeybees of a single hive ... Arsenault’s illustrations capture something of the alien vision of bees — bees see a “bee purple” in flowers that is invisible to us — through a neon orange that she uses sparingly amid paler gouache, pencil and ink landscapes. Her flowers and grasses are drawn impressionistically, while the bees themselves are made more emotionally legible with cartoonish eyes and even smiles ... The hexagons of honeycomb, as drawn by Arsenault, seem so perfect as to be fanciful precisely when they are fact.”

— Rivka Galchen, *New York Times Book Review*

“Arsenault’s scenes are a captivating mixture of smudgy charcoals, soft yellows, and fluorescent oranges, combining crisp shapes with more abstract figures. The entertaining tone and freewheeling art are a pure joy, but there’s plenty of science here, too, and a closing note about the importance of bees to our ecosystem brings the point home. Boisterously written, gorgeously illustrated, and sneakily educational.”

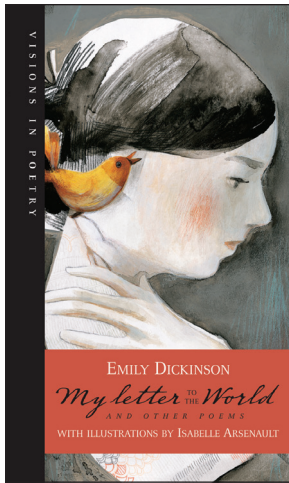
— Sarah Hunter, *Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

“Quebec illustrator Isabelle Arsenault ... brings the text to life with her signature mixed-media style, a unique combination of gouache and pencil. Predominantly done in yellows and black, the images are accented with pops of blue and fuchsia flora. Hall and Arsenault are a perfect match. Each of their work acts to strengthen the other’s; neither the words nor the pictures are overshadowed. *The Honeybee* also strikes an ideal balance between fact and fiction, proving that accuracy and playfulness are not mutually exclusive.”

— *Quill & Quire*, STARRED REVIEW

“Quebec illustrator Isabelle Arsenault ... brings the text to life with her signature mixed-media style, a unique combination of gouache and pencil. Predominantly done in yellows and black, the images are accented with pops of blue and fuchsia flora. Hall and Arsenault are a perfect match. Each of their work acts to strengthen the other’s; neither the words nor the pictures are overshadowed. *The Honeybee* also strikes an ideal balance between fact and fiction, proving that accuracy and playfulness are not mutually exclusive.”

— Elizabeth Bush, *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*



My Letter to the World and Other Poems

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

Shortlisted:

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

Once Upon a Northern Light

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

Shortlisted:

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



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

— *Kirkus*, STARRED REVIEW

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

— *Publishers Weekly*, STARRED REVIEW

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

— *School Library Journal*, STARRED REVIEW

"Award-winning Arsenault's (*Jane, the Fox & Me*, 2013) gorgeous, muted illustrations begin in blacks and grays but gradually expand to include bright swatches of color—green pine needles, the yellow eyes of an owl, 'the fox / in his auburn coat and long black boots' — and the once-smudgy landscape takes on tantalizing depth. The lilting, whispering rhythm and tone of Pendziwol's poem, along with the accompanying serene landscape, make this a perfect snuggly bedtime read-aloud. A sweet and lovely tale of waking up to a world magically transformed by winter."

— Sarah Hunter, *Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

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

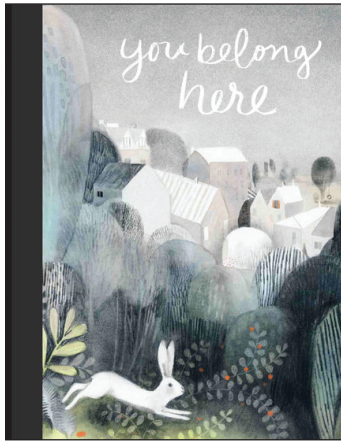
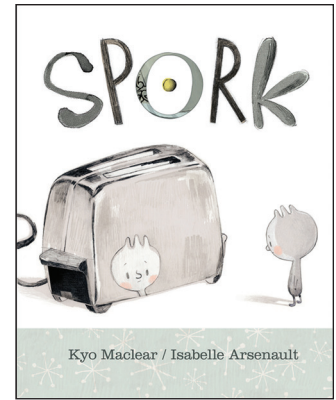
— Sarah Sorensen, *Quill & Quire*

Spork

Best Books for Kids & Teens starred selection, Canadian Children's Book Centre
Best Children's Books of the Year, Bank Street Children's Book Committee
IBBY Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities
Quebec's Booksellers Award 2012

Shortlisted:

Horace Mann Upstanders Book Award
Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award



You Belong Here

National Indie Excellence Awards, Children's Inspirational/Motivational, Finalist (2017)

Independent Publishers Book Awards, Children's Picture Books (7 & Under), Gold (2017)

“Watercolor illustrations utilize every gradation of gray to achieve astonishing, soft specificity and alternatively show human houses and animal homes in the natural world. Mellow reds, greens, and yellows crop up here and there, serving as keen testaments to the power of placement in the scenes they depict.”

— *Kirkus*, STARRED REVIEW

Captain Rosalie

“Arsenault's mostly red, black and white ink watercolours are stunning.”

— Alex O'Connell, *The Times*, *Children's Book of the Week*



Other Foreign Rights & Translations

Alpha

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

The Honey Bee

Canada (French World): Éditions de la Pastèque

La caja de los recuerdos

Spanish & French: OQO Éditions

La cœur de monsieur Le Gauguin

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

Louis parmi les spectres

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

My Letter to the World and Other Poems

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

Once Upon a Northern Light

Canada (French): Éditions Scholastic
France: Éditions Magnard Jeunesse
Germany: Verlag Freies Geistesleben
Korea: Daekyo Co., Ltd.
North America (English): Groundwood Books
Spain: Ediciones SM
United Kingdom: Walker Books

Spork

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

Capitaine Rosalie

France: Éditions Gallimard Jeunesse
United Kingdom: Walker Books

Albert's Quiet Quest

Chinese (Complex): WordField Publishing Ltd.
Chinese (Simplified): Beijing Tianlue Books Co, Ltd.
Canada (French World): La Pastèque
Italian: Mondadori Libri Italy
Korean: Miseghy
Russian: Mann, Ivanov & Ferber
Swedish: Bokforlaget Opal AB



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