



INTERNATIONAL BOARD ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

IBBY
AUSTRALIA

**NOMINATION
IBBY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS
2024**

COUNTRY OF NOMINATION: AUSTRALIA

ILLUSTRATOR: MATT OTTLEY

DOSSIER



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CULTURAL FUND

Acknowledgements

Dossier compiled by Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM on behalf of IBBY Australia, December 2022

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Information contained in the dossier has also been supplied by Matt Ottley and has been drawn from other bibliographical sources, including the records held at the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature and the *AustLit* database.

Contents of the dossier may be viewed by interested researchers and IBBY members, and is posted on the IBBY website. However, due to copyright restrictions on the **reviews and articles** by individual contributors, these cannot be copied or transmitted electronically.

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1. Biographical Information on the Candidate

Matt Ottley (24 August 1962-) is a writer and illustrator of stories for children and young adults. He's published more than 30 picture books and contributed artworks to many fiction and non-fiction books. He is also a composer and is highly regarded for his multi-modal works, combining books and music.

Matt Ottley was born in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, where he spent the first eleven and a half years of his life. His mother was a landscape artist, and as a child he and his brothers regularly travelled with her on painting excursions into the bush and around the villages of the Western Highlands. After almost failing high school in Sydney, he lived the itinerant life of a stockman for some years on cattle stations in Queensland, before returning to Sydney to study fine art and music. During his twenties he spent a couple of years in the UK, working as an equestrian artist, painting some of Britain's leading polo ponies and thoroughbreds.

He has since become a children's author/illustrator and his works have been published in several languages. His early published work includes children's books *What Faust Saw* (1995), *Mrs Millie's Painting* (1997), and *Luke's Way of Looking* (1999). His book for adults and young adults, *Requiem for a Beast* (2007) combines all of his talents, and includes a CD of music for chamber orchestra. His multimodal masterpiece *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* has recently been released to much acclaim. He has been recipient of the CBCA Picture Book of the Year Award twice – in 2021 for *How To Make a Bird* written by Meg McKinlay and in 2008 for *Requiem for a Beast* which he wrote, illustrated, and composed music for. The latter also won the Queensland Premier's Literary Award in 2008. He also won the Prime Minister's Literary Award for *How To Make a Bird*, and the West Australian Premier's Prize for Writing for Children 2020 and was shortlisted in the Queensland Literary Awards. *Teacup* written by Rebecca Young won the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature 2016 and was also included in the IBBY Honour List (Illustration) in 2018.

Beyond the books, Ottley has produced paintings for private homes and art gallery walls. Editors of *The Lancet Psychiatry* have commissioned Matt to create twelve covers for this prestigious journal in 2023.

As a musician and composer he has released five commercial CDs. He has worked as a professional flamenco guitarist and is currently an endorsed Yamaha musician and is involved in many exciting music composition projects, which you can find out more about on the multi-modal/music page of his website. His most popular and innovative initiative is the Sound of Picture Books™ performances.

'Some things I love, apart from the arts are woodworking, tea and wildlife. For many years along side my day job I worked as a volunteer wildlife rescuer, specialising in snakes, possums and bats.' Ottley currently lives with his partner in a peaceful little cottage on a rainforest covered mountain in Bundjalung country, Northern NSW.

Matt Ottley is a master of both art and musical composition and his multimodal work makes him an outstanding nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2024. [See also **5. Awards and Other Distinctions p 10.**]

2. Portrait Photograph of the Candidate

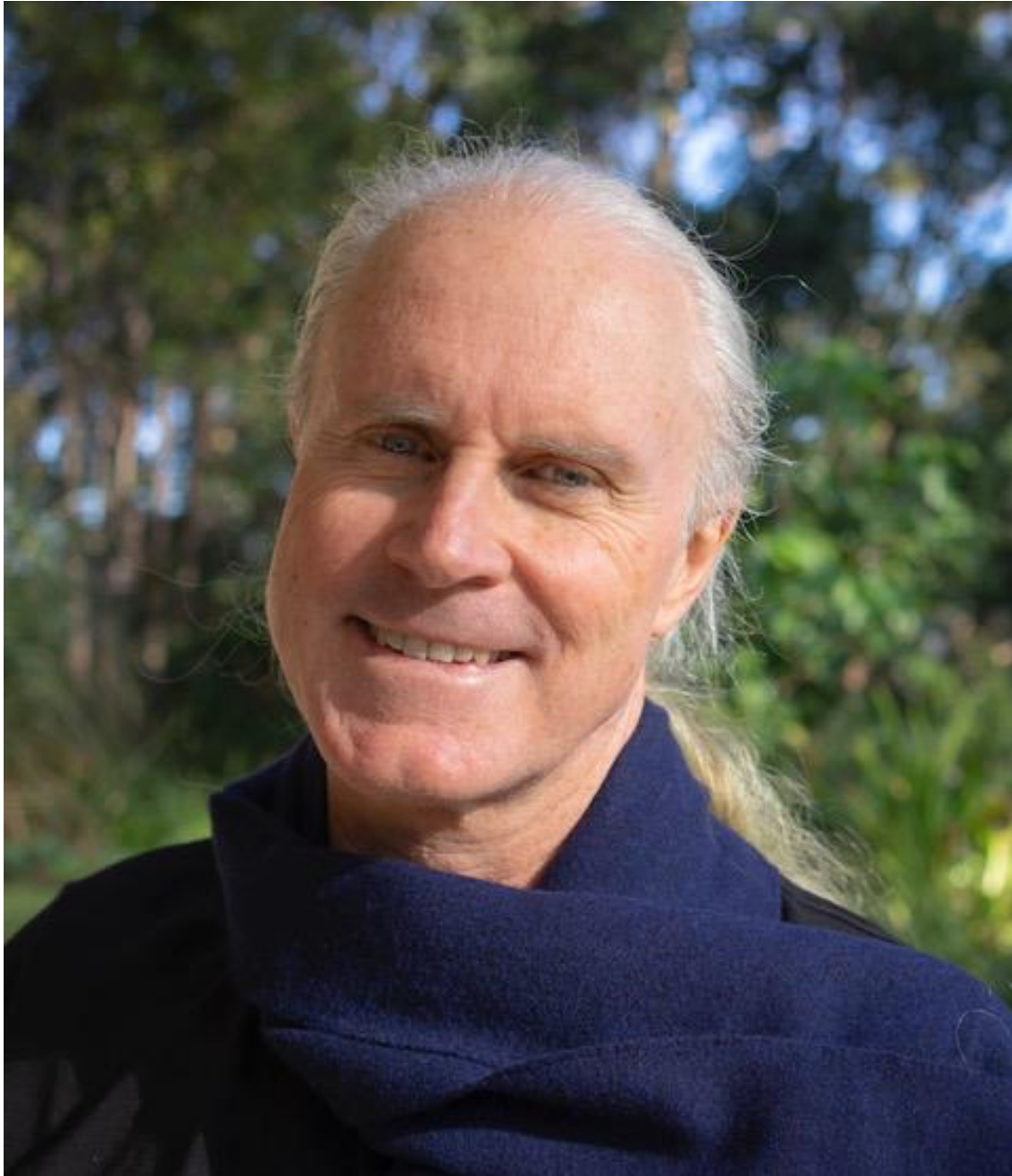


Photo ©Tina Wilson

[See copy in **Appendix C. CD** contained in dossier.]

3. Statement of Candidate's Contribution

'If my books can have furthered, in their small way, the cause of compassion and empathy, then it will all have been worthwhile.' (Ottley in Lawn March 2022, p 10.)

Matt Ottley is an extraordinarily gifted artist who works across several artistic platforms. Described as a 'maestro' (Lawn March 2022), he is a writer, artist, composer and musician and has produced several works which are multi-modal.

Ottley's works are intensely detailed, involving years of preparation, and he is recognised as a master of "subtext" in his use of visual metaphor. His illustrations contain multiple layers of meaning:

For example, *Requiem for a Beast* includes a novella length text, nearly 100 pages of images and a 70 page musical score, and took five years from conception to publication. Matt has created a 50-minute art-house film for his most recent book, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*, combining his art, music and words—the book and music took five years to create—into an extraordinary visual and auditory experience.

'Matt's unmatched genius came to the fore as we viewed this peerless work.' (Lawn February 2022) Acclaimed illustrator, Jan Ormerod, commented that:

'Requiem for a Beast was designed by Ottley as a genre crossover work for young adults. He anticipates and deserves a high level of reader participation. An open mind assists in understanding that the complexity of the content demanded a form which is rich and various, and needs to be absorbed through repeated revisiting and thoughtful meditation ... Only an artist of Ottley's stature could depict his surreal dream sequences, turbulent weather, vast Australian landscapes, cattle drives, myth, legend and intimate human interaction with such aplomb and visual inventiveness.' (Ormerod 2008, pp 41–2)

His art is exquisitely conceived and executed:

'I've often used shadows as an expression of the amazing power that our subconscious has in directing our everyday lives ... Sometimes I use shadows purely as a way of reinforcing a strong sense of side light. Beauty of form is, for me, most often enhanced by a strong side light'. (Lawn February 2022)

He writes and illustrates about the different ways in which it is possible to really see the world:

Matt has the neurological condition known as Synaesthesia, where sound and colour are intertwined, and is also red-green colour blind. This theme of difference was exemplified in an early work, *Luke's Way of Looking* (2012, 1999) written by Nadia Wheatley in which a young boy attempts to resist his teacher's prescriptive way of viewing the world and to paint what he sees instead. *Suri's Wall* (2018) by Lucy Estela reveals with dramatic impact the world beneath the wall of the fortress in which Suri and the children are contained, as it really is, and the power of the imagination which has created an alternative view to offer hope and comfort to the children. *How To Make a Bird* (2020) by Meg McKinlay is a tour de force of imaginative rendering.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2024: Matt Ottley

Struggles with problems and fears trouble every child no matter how brave they might be in certain circumstances. Ottley has imaginatively tackled a range of issues, including mental illness:

In John Marsden's *Home and Away* (2009) the trauma of war is brought home to the reader. Danny Parker's *Parachute* (2013) deals with a boy's fear of heights and how he overcomes that. In Rebecca Young's *Teacup* (2015) a boy's arduous journey is never entirely explained, but instead suggested emotionally. Danny Parker's *Sarah and the Steep Slope* (2017) is about surmounting another obstacle. And in his recent work, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* (2022) he takes this to a new level in exploring mental illness and a psychotic episode via the prism of the artistic imagination. Matt Ottley's own experience makes this a deeply personal, astoundingly penetrating work of hauntingly painful beauty.

Inspiration is translated into Ottley's painstaking execution:

'That blank canvas, blank page or blank musical stave can be daunting. It's almost mocking in its emptiness, gently telling you that the minute you make a mark on all that whiteness the idea you're trying to express will be forever destroyed. 'The "idea" in concept is perfect, in execution it's flawed. Part of the beauty of the process is the struggle one has with the material in trying to wield it back to the purity of the idea. The closer one gets to that state of purity the more rewarding is the making of the work.' (Copyright Agency)

'Research, in its various forms, is an important aspect of his creative process:

'There is direct research – in an academic sense – such as reading books about a subject, interviewing experts, travelling to specific places, and then there's the kind of research one does for creative reasons, such as looking at paintings, listening to music or going to the theatre,' explains Matt. 'I'm not talking about inspiration in this kind of research, it's more to do with technique. How does another painter get the quality of light I'm trying to express? Or how are the ways in which other composers use the devices of tension creation and resolution?' (Copyright Agency)

He has always enjoyed experimenting with style and medium and his knowledge of other artists' work also imbues his own:

Reviews have commented on the richly developed influence of other artists on his work and also on its artistic originality and ingenuity.

Storytelling is fundamental to the illustrator's craft and he has demonstrated this in both collaborations, and in his own authored works:

'The key to producing publishable material, Matt believes, is a natural ability for storytelling. 'You might be a lousy speller, but if you have the gift of being able to create amazing stories you're more likely to be published than someone who writes well, but has no flair for narrative.' (Copyright Agency)

He is one of Australia's finest artists and his suite of other talents makes his work both intriguingly eclectic and stunningly impressive. Matt Ottley is a consummate 'artiste' richly deserving of further international recognition.

4. Essays, Interviews or Articles

This dossier **contains copies** of the following **three articles** in **Appendix A**:

Lawn, Joy ‘Matt Ottley: Maestro’ *Magpies: Talking About Books for Children* Vol 37, No 1, March 2022, pp 8–10.

Chenery, Susan ‘A visceral experience of psychosis: why one artist spent three years painting bipolar disorder’ *The Guardian* 8 June 2022
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/jun/08/a-visceral-experience-of-psychosis-why-one-artist-spent-three-years-painting-bipolar-disorder>>

Higgie, Jennifer ‘Writer, illustrator, musician and composer’ *The Saturday Paper* No 390, March 12–18, 2022
<<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/culture/books/2022/03/12/writer-illustrator-musician-and-composer-matt-ottley/164700360013483#hrd>>

Other Biographical and Critical Sources Include:

‘Beneath the Skin’ *Scan* Vol 21, No 2, May 2002.

‘Destigmatising Mental Illness: Matt Ottley’s ‘The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness’ *NSW Arts Health Network NSW/ACT*
<<https://www.artshealthnetwork.com.au/destigmatising-mental-illness-matt-ottleys-the-tree-of-ecstasy-and-unbearable-sadness/>>

Dow, Steve ‘Matt Ottley on love, life, and the “destructive power of dogma” ’ *Limelight* 17 March 2022
<<https://limelightmagazine.com.au/features/matt-ottley-on-love-life-and-the-destructive-power-of-dogma/>>

Hateley, Erica ‘Productive Anxieties: Lostness in ‘The Arrival’ and ‘Requiem for a Beast’ ’ *Papers: Explorations into Children’s Literature* Vol 23, No 1, January 2015 pp 73–86.

Hateley, Erica ‘Requiem for a Beast: A Case Study in Controversy in *The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship 2014 Official Conference Proceedings 2014*
<<https://eprints.qut.edu.au/72924/19/72924%28pub%29.pdf>>

Lawn, Joy ‘Matt Ottley and his Books’ *paperbarkwords.blog* February 21, 2022
<<https://paperbarkwords.blog/2022/02/21/matt-ottley-and-his-books%ef%bf%bc/>>

‘Matt Ottley’ *Copyright Agency*
<<https://www.copyright.com.au/profile/matt-ottley/>>

‘Ottley, Matt (1962-)’ *Encyclopedia.com*
<<https://www.encyclopedia.com/children/scholarly-magazines/ottley-matt-1962>>

Ottley, Matt *About Me*
<<http://mattottley.com/about/>>

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Ottley, Matt 'Lesley Rees Lecture', 2008.

Rafidi, Mark. ed. [Profile] in *Standing on the shoulders of giants: insights from Australia's great picture book authors and illustrators* Shore Drift an imprint of Harbour Publishing House, 2014.

'Stockman, bull-chaser, artist, best-selling children's book author: the many lives of Matt Ottley' *ABC Radio Life Matters* with Hilary Harper 3 March 2022
<<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/stockman,-bull-chaser,-artist,-best-selling-childrens-book-aut/13778060>>

'Teaching Resource: Matt Ottley' March 23, 2016
<<https://u3144875wordpresscom.wordpress.com/>>

'The Colour of Music Book Review and Interview' *Reading Opens Doors blog*
<<https://blog.readingopensdoors.com.au/?p=858>>

Whitehead, Kate 'Profile: Australian artist Matt Ottley on battling bipolar disorder, fighting bulls in the Outback and finally finding happiness' *South China Post Magazine* 30 October 2021
<<https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/arts-music/article/3154173/australian-artist-matt-ottley-battling-bipolar>>

[See also list of reviews of 5 books submitted, p 20.]

5. Awards and other Distinctions

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS, EXHIBITIONS & PERFORMANCES

International Awards Arranged per Award Category:

International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Honour List:

- **2018 (Illustration)** *Teacup* written by Rebecca Young illustrated by Matt Ottley

International Youth Library (IYL) White Ravens:

- 2014 *Parachute* Written by Danny Parker illustrated by Matt Ottley
- 2009 *Home and Away* Written by John Marsden. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- 2008 *Requiem for a Beast* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley

Hong Kong International Literary Festival:

- 2021, World Premier Film Screening of *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*
- Performed work composed for *The Incredible Freedom Machines* and *Tree* with pianist Alf Demasi, 2019
- Performed work composed for *Teacup*, Asia Society, 2019

Iranian Illustrators Society and the Children's Book Council of Iran:

- Invited to exhibit in 'Peace Should Be Learned in Childhood' exhibition International Day of Peace, September 2019, Teheran

South Korea Tour:

- Tour to key public libraries across South Korea, showcasing Matt's multi-modal works, 2019
- Collaborative musical workshop with the South Korean Picturebook Association in Seoul, 2019
- Workshop for families and future teachers in Seoul as part of the South Korea Teacher's College, 2019
- Two tours of South Korea, including a performance at the Nami Island International Children's Festival, early 2000's

United Kingdom:

- Various group exhibitions and commissions

Malaysia:

- Australian International School workshops

Japan:

- School tour of Japan, 2003

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AWARDS FOR PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT

- Australia Council for the Arts Grant, Literature Board, *Requiem for a Beast*, 2005
- Australia Council for the Arts Grant, Music Board, *Requiem for a Beast*, 2005
- Australia Council for the Arts Grant, *Mrs Millie's Painting*, 1996

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CHILDREN'S & YA BOOK AWARDS

Australian Awards Arranged per Award Category:

Australian Book Design Awards:

- **1995 Winner** *What Faust Saw* Written and Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2016 Shortlisted** *Teacup* Written by Rebecca Young. Illustrated by Matt Ottley

Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award:

- **2021 Winner** *How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2016 Shortlisted** *Suri's Wall* Written by Lucy Estela. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2014 Shortlisted** *Parachute* Written by Danny Parker. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2009 Honour Book** *Home and Away* Written by John Marsden. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2008 Winner** *Requiem for a Beast* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2001 Shortlisted** *Faust's Party* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2000 Honour Book** *Luke's Way of Looking* Written by Nadia Wheatley. Illustrated by Matt Ottley

Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notables:

- **2021** *How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2019** *The Incredible Freedom Machines* Written by Kirli Saunders. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2017** *Crusts* Written by Danny Parker. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2016** *Suri's Wall* Written by Lucy Estela. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2014** *Parachute* Written by Danny Parker. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2012** *No Kind of Superman* Written by Danny Parker. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2009** *Home and Away* Written by John Marsden. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2008** *Requiem for a Beast* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2001** *Faust's Party* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley

- **2000 Book** *Luke's Way of Looking* Written by Nadia Wheatley. Illustrated by Matt Ottley

NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature:

- **2016 Winner** *Teacup* Written by Rebecca Young. Illustrated by Matt Ottley

Prime Minister's Literary Award for Children's Fiction:

- **2021 Winner** *How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2019 Shortlisted** *The Incredible Freedom Machines* Written by Kirli Saunders. Illustrated by Matt Ottley

Queensland Premier's Literary Awards (later Queensland Literary Awards) Young Adult Book Award:

- **2021 Shortlisted** *How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2016 Shortlisted** *Teacup* Written by Rebecca Young. Illustrated by Matt Ottley
- **2008 Winner** *Requiem for a Beast* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley

SCBWI Crystal Kite Awards:

- **2021 Winner** *How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley

West Australian Premier's Prize for Writing for Children:

- **2020 Winner** *How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley

6. Complete Bibliography

Picture Books:

- *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*, Written and illustrated, and music composed by Matt Ottley. Dirt Lane Press, 2022.
- *Afloat in Venice*, Written and illustrated by Tina Wilson, music composed by Matt Ottley, One Tentacle Publishing, 2021.
- *The Colour of Music*, Written by Lisa Tiffen, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Midnight Sun, 2021.
- *How to Make a Bird*, Written by Meg McKinlay, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Walker Books, 2020.
- *Dumazi & The Big Yellow Lion*, Written by Valanga Khoza, illustrated and music composed by Matt Ottley. Scholastic, 2019.
- *Mrs Millie's Painting* (re-release), Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. One Tentacle Publishing, 2019.
- *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Scholastic, 2019.
- *The Incredible Freedom Machines*, Written by Kirli Saunders, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Scholastic, 2018.
- *Sarah and the Steep Slope*, Written by Danny Parker, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hardie Grant Egmont Little Hare, 2017.
- *Crusts*, Written by Danny Parker, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hardie Grant Egmont - Little Hare, 2016.
- *Suri's Wall*, Written by Lucy Estela, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Penguin Random House, 2015.
- *Teacup*, Written by Rebecca Young, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Ashton Scholastic, 2015.
- *Parachute*, Written by Danny Parker, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hardie Grant, 2013.
- *Tree*, Written by Danny Parker, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hardie Grant, 2012.
- *No Kind of Superman*, Written by Danny Parker, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Windy Hollow Books, 2011.
- *Me and My Dad*, Written by Sally Morgan and Ezekiel Kwaymullina, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Little Hare, 2010.
- *The Serpent's Tale*, Written by Gary Crew, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Lothian/Hachette, 2010.
- *Home and Away*, Written by John Marsden, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Lothian/Hachette, 2009.
- *Requiem for a Beast*, Written. illustrated and music composed by Matt Ottley. Lothian/Hachette, 2007.
- *Faust in Space*, Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hachette Livre, 2006.
- *Little Penguin*, Written and illustrated by Josie Montano, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Lothian Books, 2005.
- *The Bubble*, Written by Josie Montano, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Lothian Books, 2004.
- *Ballads, Satire and Salt*, Written by Stephen Oliver, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Greywacke Press, 2003.
- *Hynam and B*, Written by Brian Caswell, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hodder Headline, 2003.
- *Faust's Party*, Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hodder Headline, 2000.

- *Luke's Way of Looking*, Written by Nadia Wheatley, illustrated by Matt Ottley. (Walker Classic Series) Sydney, Walker Books, 2012; Sydney, NSW, Hodder Headline, 1999.
- *Mrs Millie's Painting*, Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley, Hodder Headline, 1997.
- *Sailing Home*, Written by Colin Thompson, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hodder Headline, 1996.
- *What Faust Saw*, Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hodder Headline, 1995.
- *Albert's Rainy Day*, 1987 Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Hodder & Stoughton, 1987.
- *Please Don't Feed the Animals*, Written by Brian Mackness, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Ashton Scholastic, 1984.

Non-Fiction:

- *Exploring Australia by Land*, Written by Wade Hughes, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Cammeray, N.S.W, Horwitz Grahame, 1987.
- *Exploring Ancient Australia*, by Wade Hughes, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Cammeray, N.S.W, Horwitz Grahame, 1988.
- *Prehistoric Australia*, Written by Brian Mackness, illustrated by Matt Ottley. Golden Press, 1987.
- *Venomous wildlife*, Golden Press, 1983.
- *Dinosaurs*, Golden Press, 1983.
- *Ancient Australia*, Golden Press, 1983.
- *Explorers*, Golden Press, 1983.

Magazine Illustrations:

- *The Lancet Psychiatry* (12 covers), 2023 [forthcoming].
- *School Magazine*, NSW Various illustrations since 2004
- *Eyespy* (children's magazine), 1985 Ashton Scholastic

Music Composition:

The following are all part of The Sound of Picture Books™ initiative (multi-modal/ musical/ performance works) based on Matt's books:

- *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*: 50-minute multimodal work containing images, music and narration. The music is scored for large orchestra (76 piece), 40 voice choir and solo tenor by Matt Ottley, 2022. Guest composition by Alf Demasi.
- *How to Make a Bird*: 11-minute multimodal work containing images, Meg McKinlay's narration of her text for the book *How to Make a Bird*, and music for string quintet, piano, French horn and clarinet by Matt Ottley, 2021.
- *Afloat in Venice*: 11-minute multimodal work containing images, Tina Wilson's narration of her text for the book *Afloat in Venice*, and music for string quintet, piano, French horn and clarinet by Matt Ottley, 2021.
- *The Incredible Freedom Machines*: 8-minute multimodal work containing images, Kirli Saunders' narration of her text for the book *The Incredible Freedom Machines*, and music for string quintet and piano by Matt Ottley, 2019.
- *Dumazi and the Big Yellow Lion*: 30-minute multimodal work containing images from the book *Dumazi and the Big Yellow Lion*. Music composed for small orchestra

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with guest composition by Valanga Khoza (narration, lyrics and playing of traditional zulu instruments), 2018.

- *Teacup*: 40-minute multimodal work containing animations, images and narrated text from the award winning book *Teacup*. Music for chamber orchestra (Piano, 1 x violin, 1 x cello, 1 x double bass, recorder quartet, organ, recorded natural sounds, soprano and alto) by Matt Ottley, 2016.
- *Home and Away*: 18-minute multimodal work containing images, the narrated text from the book *Home & Away*, and music for symphony orchestra and soprano by Matt Ottley, 2014.
- *Parachute*: 8-minute multimodal work containing images, the narrated text from the book *Parachute*, and music for string quintet and piano by Matt Ottley, 2014.
- *Tree*: 8-minute multimodal work containing images, Danny Parker's narration of his text for the book *Tree*, and music for string quintet and piano by Matt Ottley, 2013.
- *Requiem for a Beast*: 30-minute multimodal work containing images and music (no narration). Music composed by Matt Ottley for string quintet, piano, harpsichord, soprano, tenor (traditional Bundjalung singing), 2007.

Exhibitions of visual arts:

Matt has exhibited paintings in the following major galleries, and has artworks in private and public collections around the world (note: this is not a complete list).

- The Upstairs Gallery, Cairns
- Noella Burn Gallery, Sydney
- Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney – solo exhibition
- Bond Street Gallery, London
- Black Swan Prize for Portraiture, Finalist, 2011
- Tryon Gallery, London
- Fremantle Children’s Literature Centre, Fremantle – solo exhibitions
- Customs House gallery, Warnambool
- National Art Gallery, Canberra – solo exhibition
- Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney
- Books Illustrated, Melbourne
- Stop Laughing, this is Serious Gallery, Sydney
- Orange Regional Gallery, NSW
- State Library of Western Australia, WA

7. Translated Editions

Please note that this is a select list of translations.

How to Make a Bird

- Walker Books, UK
- Candlewick Press (April 2021), US
- Kagaku Dojin Publishing Co, Inc, Japan (co-edition rights - HC)
- Teas Yayincilik A.S. (Hep Kitap), (April 2022), Turkish – PB

Dumazi and the Big Yellow Lion

- Brinque Book Editora de Livros Ltda, Brazil. (Brazilian Portuguese print version)

The Incredible Freedom Machines

- Scholastic, Canada - French language
- Kaliedoscope, France
- Hippo Cocuk/Aras Yayıncılık, Turkey
- Polyandria Print LLC, Russia

Sarah and the Steep Slope

- Charliebook, Korean

Crusts

- Dongsim, Korean

Teacup

- Simbol Editions, Spain
- Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing, China [Cha bei / [Aodaliya] Libei'er Yang zhu ; [Aodaliya] Mate Aoteli hui ; Wang Lin yi
茶杯 / [澳大利亚]丽贝尔·杨著 ; [澳大利亚]马特·奥特利绘 ; 王林译 Teacup.
Chinese. Beijing, Wai yu jiao xue yu yan jiu chu ban she, 2017.]
- Hanulim Publishing, South Korea
- Dial, Penguin Random House, USA
- Terre di Mezzo Editore, Italy
- Kaleidoscope, France
- Polyandria Print LLC, Russia
- Kagaku Dojin Publishing Co, Inc, Japan

Parachute

- The Eastern Publishing, Taiwanese
- Sandviks, Norwegian/Finnish [*Gutten med fallskjermen* Danny Parker, Matt Ottley (illustrator), (translation by Ane Sjøbu of *Parachute*), Stavanger: Goboken, 2013]
- Oriental Babies, China
- Darim Publishing Co, Korean

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- *Parachute* Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2016. (English)
- Shenzhen Bookin, China (English)
- Harold Grinspoon, Arabic
- KVA Çocuk – Sincap Yayıncılık, Turkish

Tree

- GoldHuman Education and Technology, Bilingual Simplified Chinese / English
- Dotori Forest Publishing, Korean
- Scholastic Asia, English (Asia)
- *Drevo: majhna zgodba o velikih stvarih* Danny Parker, Matt Ottley (illustrator), (translation by Barbara Majcenovič Kline of *Tree: A Little Story about Big Things*) Hoče: Scrivnost, 2017. (Slovenian)

Me and My Dad

- Fei Bao International Culture, Taiwanese [*我的英雄老爸* Sally Morgan, Ezekiel Kwaymullina, Matt Ottley (illustrator), (translation by Jiaying Li of *Me and My Dad*), Taipei: 飛寶國際文化 , 2012]

What Faust Saw

- Dutton Juvenile, USA. (1996)
- Germany
- Kaliedescope, France
- Gottmer, Holland
- Ireland

Faust's Party

- I-Education Limited (through Inter Australian Agency), Korea, 2004

8. Ten Most Important Books by the Candidate

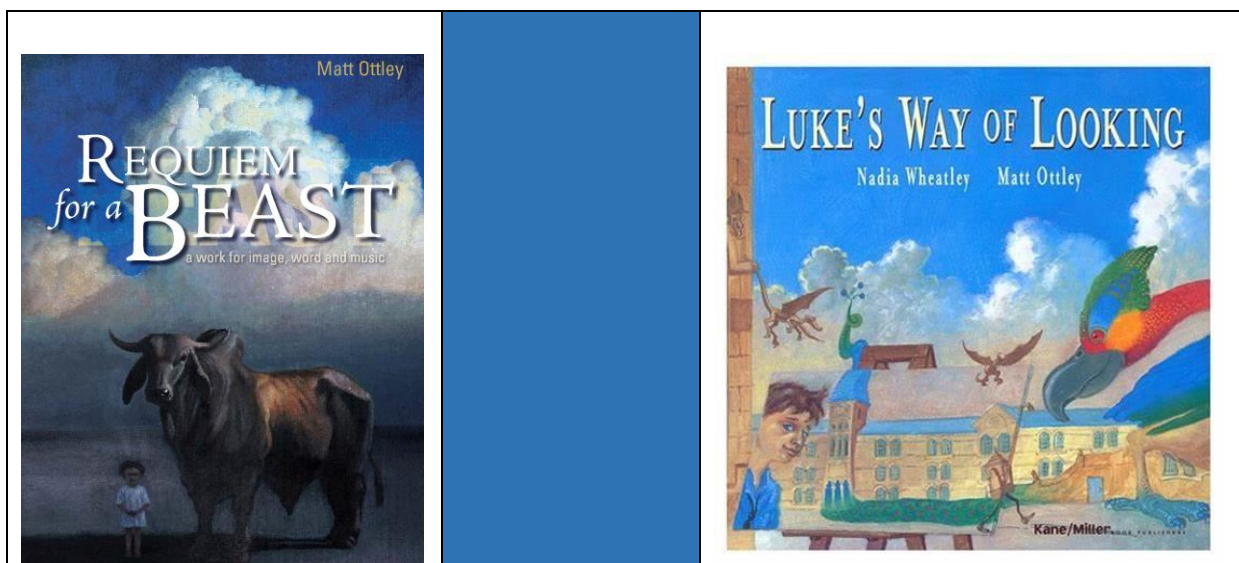
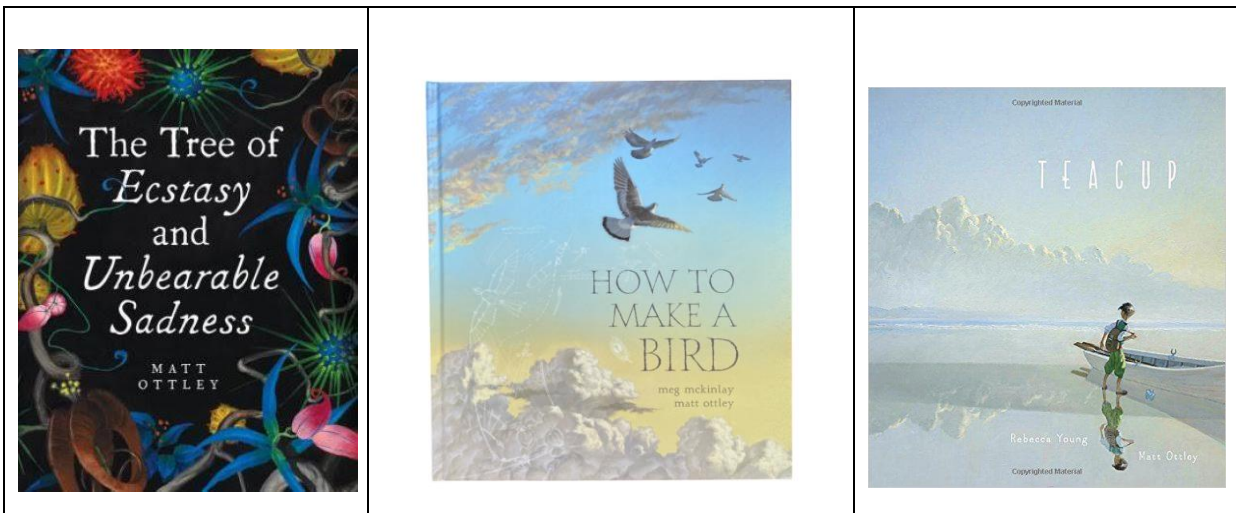
- *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* Written and illustrated, and music composed by Matt Ottley. Orange, NSW, Dirt Lane Press, 2022.
- *How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Newtown, NSW, Walker Books, 2020.
- *The Incredible Freedom Machines* Written by Kirli Saunders. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Gosford, NSW, Scholastic Australia, 2018.
- *Teacup* Written by Rebecca Young. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Lindfield, NSW, Scholastic Australia, 2015.
- *Parachute* Written by Danny Parker. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Richmond, VIC., Little Hare, Hardie Grant, 2013.
- *Tree* Written by Danny Parker. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Richmond, VIC., Little Hare, Hardie Grant, 2012.
- *Home and Away* Written by John Marsden. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Sydney, NSW, Lothian/Hachette, 2009.
- *Requiem for a Beast* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Sydney, NSW, Lothian/Hachette Livre, 2007.
- *Luke's Way of Looking* Written by Nadia Wheatley. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. (Walker Classic Series) Sydney, Walker Books, 2012; Sydney, NSW, Hodder Headline, 1999.
- *What Faust Saw* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Rydalmere, NSW, Hodder Headline, 1995.



IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2024: Matt Ottley

9. List of Five Books Sent to Jurors

- *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* Written and illustrated, and music composed by Matt Ottley. Orange, NSW, Dirt Lane Press, 2022.
- *How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Newtown, NSW, Walker Books, 2020.
- *Teacup* Written by Rebecca Young. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Lindfield, NSW, Scholastic Australia, 2015.
- *Requiem for a Beast* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Sydney, NSW, Lothian/Hachette Livre, 2007.
- *Luke's Way of Looking* Written by Nadia Wheatley. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. (Walker Classic Series) Sydney, Walker Books, 2012; Sydney, NSW, Hodder Headline, 1999.



10. Published Reviews of Works

The following is a list of **ten reviews**, two of each of five books, copies of which are contained in this dossier in **Appendix B**:

***The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* Orange, NSW, Dirt Lane Press, 2022.**

Lawn, Joy 'Review: *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*' *Magpies: Talking About Books for Children* Vol 37, No 1, March 2022, p 10.

Alessandrino, M.H. 'The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness (Matt Ottley, Dirt Lane)' *Books + Publishing* 1 December 2021

<<https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2021/12/01/206480/review-the-tree-of-ecstasy-and-unbearable-sadness/>>

***How to Make a Bird* Written by Meg McKinlay. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Newtown, NSW, Walker Books, 2020.**

Paterson, Allison '[Review] McKinlay, Meg and Matt Ottley (How to Make a Bird)' *Magpies: Talking About Books for Children* Vol 35, No 5, November 2020, p 16.

Bragaru, Natalia '[Review: *How To Make a Bird*]' *Kids Book Explorer*

<<https://www.kidsbookexplorer.com/how-to-make-a-bird-meg-mckinlay-matt-ottley/>>

***Teacup* Written by Rebecca Young. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. Lindfield, NSW, Scholastic Australia, 2015.**

Lawn, Joy '[Review] Young, Rebecca, ill. Matt Ottley (Teacup)' *Magpies: Talking About Books for Children* Vol 30, No 1, March 2015, p 33.

'[Review: *Teacup*]' *Kirkus Reviews* <<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/>>

***Requiem for a Beast* Written and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Sydney, NSW, Lothian/Hachette Livre, 2007.**

Ormerod, Jan 'Review: *Requiem for a Beast*' *Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults* Vol 16, No 1, Autumn 2008, pp 41–42.

Maugher, Chloe '[Review] *Requiem for a Beast*' *Magpies: Talking About Books for Children* Vol 22, No 4, September 2007, p 38.

***Luke's Way of Looking* Written by Nadia Wheatley. Illustrated by Matt Ottley. (Walker Classic Series) Sydney, Walker Books, 2012; Sydney, NSW, Hodder Headline, 1999.**

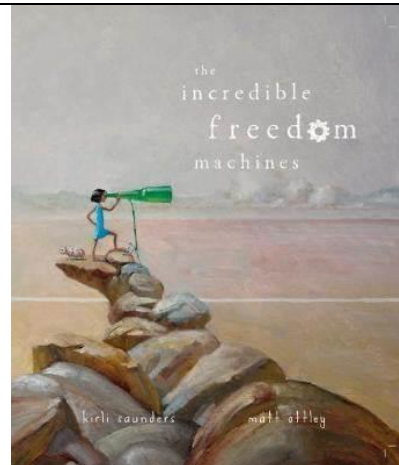
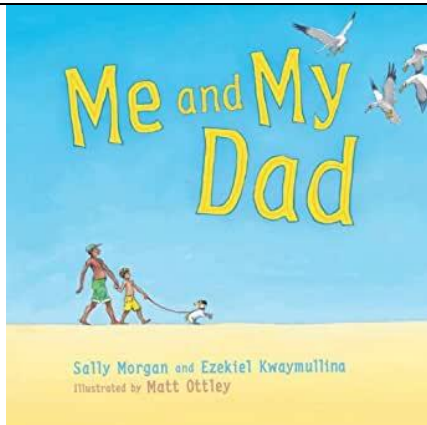
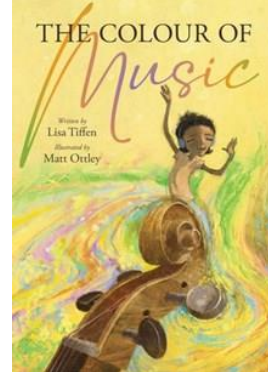
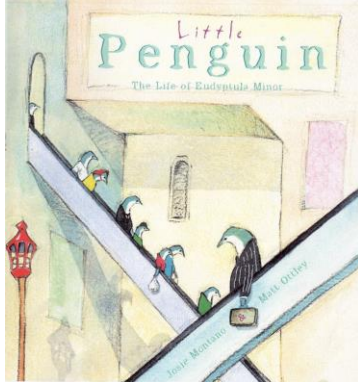
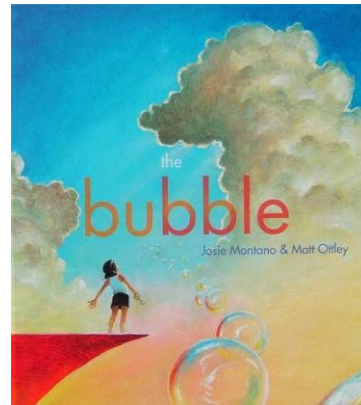
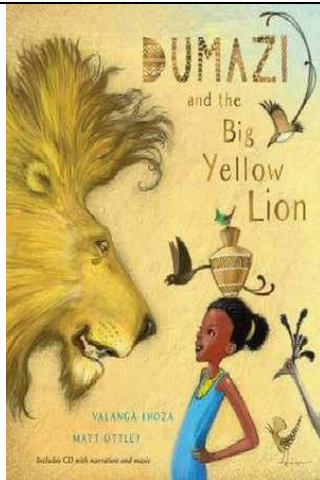
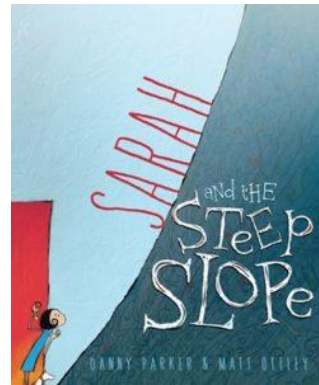
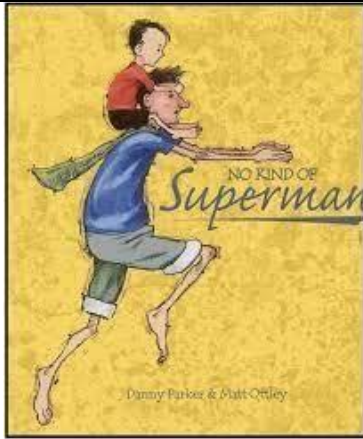
Gonis, Anastacia 'Review: Walker Classics: *Luke's Way of Looking*' *BuzzWords* 31 May 2012

<<http://www.buzzwordsmagazine.com/2012/05/lukes-way-of-looking.html>>

Linning, Lyn '[Review] *Luke's Way of Looking*' *Magpies: Talking About Books for Children* Vol 14, No 4, September 1999, pp 31–2.

11. Reproductions of Selected Book Covers





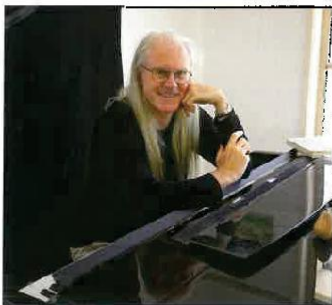
Appendix A. Articles

Lawn, Joy 'Matt Ottley: Maestro' *Magpies: Talking About Books for Children Vol 37, No 1, March 2022, pp 8–10.*

MAGPIES VOLUME THIRTY-SEVEN

Matt Ottley: Maestro

Joy Lawn interviews Matt Ottley in a brief retrospective of his books and to celebrate the publication of his new masterwork, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*.



Matt Ottley is one of our great artists. I was first aware of his work through the book *Sailing Home* (1996), with its spellbinding blue sea and dramatic perspectives. Then I was entranced by *Mrs Millie's Painting* (1997), of which I have a limited-edition print. *Luke's Way of Looking* (1999) was one of my children's three favourite picture books as they were growing up (alongside *Mrs Millie*) and it remains a prized treasure. *Requiem for a Beast* took Matt's work to another plane. Personal favourites since have been *Parachute*, *The Incredible Freedom Machines*, the sublime *Teacup* and *How to Make a Bird* and now *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* (Dirt Lane Press).

Amongst other things, Matt Ottley's books are about difference and how openness to vulnerability and seeing things from another perspective can change the world. Apart from Matt's imaginative and artistic gifts it is perhaps his deep thinking and emotional alignment with his work that make it transcendent.

I asked Matt how, apart from illustrating and writing some of the world's best picture books and composing music, he spends his time.

I don't actually get time for much else, although I do enjoy the natural environment where Tina, my partner, and I live. We are surrounded by rainforest and

whenever I can I love to walk in the bush. We are also members of a very active community within our local village, so we are often involved in community events. We are, for example, members of a local refugee and asylum seeker support group, so we spend time working with that group in its various activities. One thing I love doing is playing the piano and the guitar, but ironically, as the musical side of my career has taken off, I've had virtually no time for either instrument as I spend all of my music time writing music for others to play.

Matt illustrates his own words and also the words of others. He describes some of his collaborative book projects:

I've been blessed to have worked with some of Australia's best children's authors.

My first collaboration was organised by my publisher. I'd just had *What Faust Saw* published, and it was doing extremely well so my publisher wanted to release another work on the back of that success, but I succumbed to the dreaded writer's block! That was the only time in my entire career that such a thing has happened. My editor suggested meeting Colin Thompson to see if there would be any creative energy between us. In that meeting, I offered Colin an idea I'd had, but couldn't seem to develop, about a family that wakes up to find their house has drifted out to sea. Colin took the idea and developed it into *Sailing Home*. The collaboration with Nadia Wheatley came about because I met her at my very first ever public engagement as a writer/illustrator, which was a CBCA Book Week event in Perth in the late 1990s. We got on like a house on fire and *Luke's Way of Looking* was born from that meeting. I'm incredibly grateful to Nadia, *Luke* still remains one of the books I'm most proud of. And it was an amazing break for me at the time to have a writer of Nadia's calibre wanting to work with me. In later years my collaborations have either come via my publisher or because authors have approached me directly. My editor at Lothian, Helen Chamberlin teamed me up with John Marsden for *Home and Away*, whereas my collabora-



tion with Danny Parker came about in a slightly more unusual way: he was drama director at a private school in Perth and I was invited to see a rehearsal for a stage production of my book *Requiem for a Beast*, which he had devised. He asked if I would give him some advice on a picture book text he had written for his family. I was blown away by the quality of his work, and asked if he'd mind if I sent it to one of my editors. That text became *Tree*, published by Hardie Grant. Danny and I have become very good friends, and there has always been an unspoken sense between us that we very much speak the same language. He can write a beautifully crafted picture book sentence somehow knowing how I will fill in all of the unspoken gaps with my images.

Many authors contact me asking if I would like to illustrate their work. Mostly I decline, sometimes even reluctantly because I do read some very beautiful work, but occasionally a work jumps out at me as something I feel I just need to illustrate. Kirli Saunder's book, *The Incredible Freedom Machines*, was one such text. Like Rebecca Young's *Teacup*, it was an illustrator's dream to work on. One of the most profoundly beautiful texts I've had the privilege of working on was Meg McKinlay's *How to Make a Bird*. If there is some other realm of consciousness that consists of pure 'flow,' then Meg and I both seemed to be plugged into that place together. Creating the images for Meg's book was like a meditation in itself. I felt like I was in a place of unhurried time, of wind-swept beaches and somehow connected into Meg's contemplation of things. My most recent collaboration was with a new writer, Lisa Tiffen, whom I had mentored for a couple of years and again, is a meditation, a beautiful text called *The Colour of Music*, about synaesthesia.

Matt explains his use of media:

I have used oil paints most in my books, which is probably because I was painting landscapes and figurative work in oils long before I began working professionally as a book illustrator, and I guess I was most comfortable with oils. But I do occasionally use other media as well. *Luke's Way of Looking* was the book in which I began experimenting with mixed media—it contains oils, watercolour, crayon, texta, pencil and acrylic paints.

EIGHT

I have in recent years also been working digitally, which has been a great discovery and revelation to me. The high-end digital painting software doesn't actually make doing the artwork any easier, it just opens the potential for exploring different approaches and techniques mid steam in a work without destroying the artwork (because one works in layers)—I love it!

Surrealism features throughout Matt's books, including the school that becomes surreal in *Luke's Way of Looking*; the Dali-esque tiger in *Suri's Wall*; much of *Requiem for a Beast*; and the elephant and elongated lines in *Parachute*. I asked Matt how surrealism enhances his art style and what other styles he uses or to which artists he pays homage:



Goodness—big question! I've never actually thought of what exactly I'm doing stylistically in a work, just done what seems appropriate for that particular work. Surrealism is one of the most powerful ways of making a statement about something, because when the rules of reality are bent, but objects themselves are depicted realistically, we tend to sit up and notice. In *Requiem for a Beast*, I referenced the Greek story of the Minotaur. The Minotaur is an archetypal story about what happens to a society when its authority figures don't deal with the traumas created within the society by suppression, oppression and warfare. I chose a surrealist representation of the Minotaur as a way of expressing the potency of these themes in the book.

In a book like *Suri's Wall*, surrealism plays an important part in expressing the power of not only human imagination, but of human need, and the power of empathy and compassion. Suri wends the sounds her fellow inmates hear, along with what she sees over the wall, into

descriptions of scenes that excite and placate her friends and give them a sense of hope. The tiger in the particular spread you refer to is on a leash, so it's not dangerous, but it is nevertheless a dangerous animal. Within the fantasies that Suri creates are hints of her own anxiety and doubt as she tries to create and maintain wonder and hope for her friends.

Like all artists I am inspired by many and varied artists. I fell in love with the works of Renaissance artist Jan Vermeer very early in my life. My mother was my foremost inspiration as an artist as she was a painter in the highlands of PNG. Brett Whitely, Jackson Pollock, Kirill Chelushkin... the list is endless. I am constantly amazed and inspired by many of my illustrator peers in this country as



well (although I don't like to use the word 'illustrator'—it has connotations of being the poor cousin of the 'superior' non-illustrative fine arts, which in terms of technique, subject matter and narrative, subtext—in fact all the aspects of painting, makes no sense).

Matt has represented characters using different styles over his career, with a hyper-realistic portrayal in *Requiem* and comparatively realistic styles in *Mrs Millie's Painting* and *Home and Away*, compared with his more recent style in *Parachute*, *Suri's Wall*, *Crusts*, *Sarah and the Steep Slope*, *Teacup* and *The Incredible Freedom Machines*, which feature spindly-limbed, more comic-style characters.

I asked Matt why he is using this style in recent books and how does he think it has changed or evolved.

The change in character look in these latter books has been defined by the nature of the stories. There is possibly an element of my maturing as an artist as

well. If I could go back and repaint *Sailing Home*, I think I would make the characters more cartoony for that story.



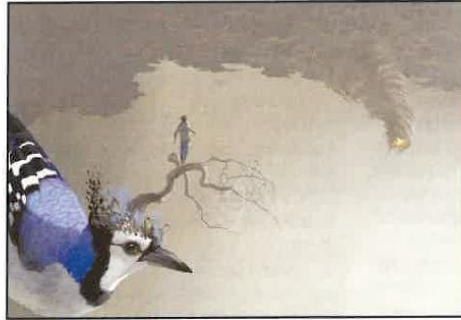
Requiem is a very serious work, and I feel that a cartoon drawing style would not have worked with that book. Danny's texts are full of whimsy and require leaps of faith that a more 'serious' drawing style would struggle with. I felt the same was required of Kirill's book (**Freedom Machines**). The reason why I also chose a similar (though slightly more realistic) figure style for **Teacup** was because of a conscious decision not to place the boy in any recognisable culture. He is the universal child refugee and because I feel we live in a world where politics fuels the worst elements of tribalism, i.e.

racism and xenophobia, I wanted the boy to be unplace-able in any particular culture or race.

In **How to Make a Bird**, the character style is somewhere between cartoon style and natural realism. I felt the text required that. The idea that there is an element of sadness embedded in the appreciation of beauty required a style that needed the solemnity of reality, but a 'letting go of reality' at the same time. One of the themes of the book is about release, about letting go.

My most recent work, the just released **The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness**, which is a work for young adults and adults, contains a variety of styles from hyper realism to surrealism and even slight abstraction in a variety of media, all defined by the evolving subject matter of the book.

Matt elaborates honestly and movingly about his new masterwork, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*:



One thing, that I can clearly see in the body of my work, since the mid 1990s, is the trajectory of what, till now, has been a private aspect of my life: my struggles with type 1 Bipolar Disorder. My latest work, TToE&US, is not exactly autobiographical, but it is based on my experiences of the psychotic episodes I have experienced. Stigma is, unfortunately, still very real: the 'othering' that happens, sometimes subtly, in the media is an example of its prevalence. I have been shunned by friends and family alike and in this work I wanted to give audiences a 'felt' artistic experience of what psychosis is like. That might sound scary, and at times the work probably is challenging, but I've also tried to imbue it with light and beauty. I want people to be moved by a sense of beauty, even if they can't understand what it's about. The story itself is a fantastical, **Alice in Wonderland**-like allegory. It is a truly multi-modal work in that the full meaning of the narrative can only be arrived at by experiencing both the book and the musical work. This doesn't necessarily need to happen at the same time, but aspects of the experience are at times only expressed in the music, or only in the words and images, and the combination of words, images and music create the full essence and substance of the work. This coming together of modes is fully expressed in the film I have made, which combines the music, images and a little footage of the orchestra, singer and choir.

The music, which is scored for a 97-piece orchestra, a 40-voice choir and a solo tenor singer, took me two years to write. I invited a musical colleague and friend, Alf Demasi to collaborate on part of the music as I wanted an external view of the subject, someone not deeply immersed in

it, but who understands me and cares deeply about the subject. Alf's contribution is only small, approximately 10% of the score, but it is important. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of the Gabby Arts Legacy Trust, the work was recorded in Europe by the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra and the Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno, with Australian singer Ben Reynolds, under British conductor Mikel Toms.

The 74 paintings in the book, which are a mixture of oil paintings, digital works that I then printed and worked over with pencil, charcoal, pen-and-ink and acrylic, took me three years to produce. The text had been written as a poem about ten years ago in a journal I kept during my recovery from a particularly debilitating episode.

This multi-modal work is a true masterpiece.

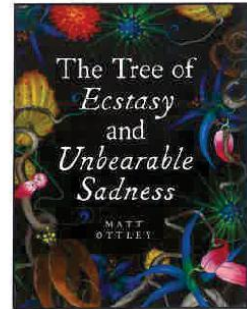
Matt concludes our interview by sharing what surprises him and what he hopes is one legacy of his books:

There isn't much that surprises me anymore apart from the constant astonishment I feel when I consider aspects of nature—the fact of a caterpillar forming a chrysalis around itself and then morphing into a completely different creature. No one has ever written a book or a piece of music that could ever be as astounding as that!

If my books can have furthered, in their small way, the cause of compassion and empathy, then it will all have been worthwhile.

<http://mattottley.com/>

<https://www.dirtianepress.com/>



The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness (2022)
Matt Ottley, Dirt Lane Press, 136pp.
978 0 6480238 5 2 \$39.99 Hb

Matt Ottley has drawn on his capacious and renowned artistic and musical virtuosity to bare his heart and mind in his monumental life's work, **The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness**. This illustrated work is gloriously executed, although it is both excruciating and enlightening to read. It portrays a boy born with a seed that made him see *things invisible to others*. It may be a gift. *His gift showed him things so beautiful they made him cry. But it also tormented him with the pain of others*. The seed becomes a tree whose flowers represent ecstasy and fruit, sadness. The extremes of emotion manifested by these progenies follow him into young manhood. He plummets into surreal nightmare scenes that almost destroy him but continues to seek the beauty that restores and uplifts him. Ottley acknowledges that some of the young man's experiences come from his own life but he writes in third person to create some distance, perhaps to protect himself, as well as the reader. His art here is, as always, magnificent, employing different styles and media. Sepia becomes full colour; delicacy becomes sumptuousness; shadow and silhouette become haunting characters; fragile yet supple line becomes fully realised three-dimensional space and, like the seed, genesis becomes metamorphosis, tempest and finally quietude. The book is a complete work of art in itself but Matt Ottley has also composed an impressive professional orchestral and choral piece that extends and enhances the artistry. **The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness** is recommended for readers 15 years and over. It is a seminal work that acknowledges and metaphorically inhabits and describes mental illness with tenderness and acuity. It is also for those who care enough to try to understand.
Review by Joy Lawn

Chenery, Susan ‘A visceral experience of psychosis: why one artist spent three years Painting bipolar disorder’ *The Guardian* 8 June 2022
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/jun/08/a-visceral-experience-of-psychosis-why-one-artist-spent-three-years-painting-bipolar-disorder>>

Creativity has been Matt Ottley’s salvation – but for the artist, composer and children’s book author, it has come at a terrible price

Up a steep road to the top of a ridge, all the mundane falls away.

From here, between the surrounding hills of the Northern Rivers region of NSW, the great heft of Wollumbin Mt Warning is revealed – its forested flanks a blue haze, its rock face summit glistening in the sun. Wedge-tailed eagles ride the thermals above, and rainforest redolent with wildlife runs in every direction.

It is to this place, Uki in the Tweed shire, that Matt Ottley retreated more than 10 years ago. The musician, artist and children’s book author lives surrounded by a raucous avian chorus. In this house – his refuge – he has found peace from the pain of his past.

Ottley has always had a heightened sensitivity to the hurt and beauty of the world. It’s something he shares with the young protagonist in his latest release, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*. It’s a monumental project comprising not just the book but an accompanying symphonic score on CD, which was performed by a Czech orchestra, and a 50-minute animation created from the book’s 74 paintings and illustrations which is screening in small theatres around the country.



‘The tree came out of one of my own psychotic experiences where I thought I had something growing inside me.’ Illustration: Matt Ottley

The story follows a boy who, like Ottley, sees things differently. “His gift showed him things so beautiful they made him cry. But it also tormented him with the pain of others that made him feel numb,” it reads. The narrative unfolds around the metaphor of a tree growing inside him: its flower is ecstasy, its fruit is sadness. It was inspired by Ottley’s bipolar disorder, which he was diagnosed with in his 40s.

“The tree really came out of one of my own psychotic experiences where I thought I had something growing inside me,” he says. “It was a plant that was sort of floral in nature. That’s what I wanted to express.”

In the book, the tree morphs into a flying cow, a reptile, then a blue bird, which flies across mountains and oceans into a world of “beauty and wonder”. All of the stages of the journey represent the stages of psychosis – such as in an ancient city, when it encounters an egocentric sovereign with the huge bulbous body of an insect.



A painting from Ottley’s 2022 book *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*.

“She is the sort of infantile self at the heart of psychosis,” Ottley says. “When you are in that state the other doesn’t exist. The world has become so warped and you’re trying to navigate your way in it.”

Flying over valleys and hills, the boy travels through the stages of fragility and revelation into darkness and tempest – until he comes back into the world and himself with “quietude” and hope.

As we sit on his terrace overlooking the natural vista, freshly baked muffins are placed on the table by Ottley’s partner, Tina Wilson. Ottley is a gentle man, delicate and kind of beatific with long white hair. One of the country’s most popular author-illustrators, he has worked on more than 40 titles – among them last year’s prime minister’s literary award-winning kids book *How To Make A Bird*, written by Meg McKinlay.



Ottley in his studio in Uki, New South Wales.

Advertisement

But he says the scope of his creativity has come at a terrible price. It wasn’t until his mid-40s that Ottley was properly diagnosed and treated for type 1 bipolar disorder. By then, he had suffered countless frightening periods of mania and depression, psychotic episodes that would end in psyche wards, and two suicide attempts.

“I have had some very high level creative abilities that are a result of being bipolar – but it is a huge price to pay for that,” Ottley said. “If you could have access to a magic button that would turn this illness off, most people would say no because of the creativity. But I would say yes.

“If I could relive my life without any of the creativity, if I could turn this illness off and live a quiet life, with a quiet mind, I would.”

He used to hide his illness, living a life of secrecy and shame. As a teenager he “would just go to ground or go to my room and ride it out. Until I was in my 40s, I just felt so alone with it.”

Ottley spent the first 11 years of his life in Papua New Guinea at a time when the country was becoming increasingly dangerous for Australians. When he was nine he was sexually assaulted by a man, a trauma he believes may have triggered a genetic predisposition to bipolar disorder.

The condition doesn’t go away, but life goes on and you can find peace.

“The way it’s explained to me is that you basically inherit a number of genes that – when they are switched on – you start to experience the illness. It can be trauma that switches those genes on.”

In the following decades, whatever he tried, his illness would be waiting to grab him and drag him down. He would become unwell, crash and burn and run. He failed school – “I just couldn’t do it” – and followed his father and brother into the bush to work as a stockman, but says he “was not good at that sort of work”. He studied at Julian Ashton art school, became unwell, went bush again. Returning to the bush became “a pattern”. He studied music at Wollongong University, but couldn’t complete that either. “I actually don’t have any educational qualifications,” he says.



‘If I could relive my life without any of the creativity, if I could turn this illness off and live a quiet life, with a quiet mind, I would.’

Advertisement

Ottley also has synaesthesia, a neurological condition. “Sound starts to become very colourful and I see lots of shapes, and start becoming hypersensitive to sound and light.” In a rehearsal with musicians he can tell if someone is a bit off-key, “because it is the wrong colour”.

The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness had its genesis in two periods of illness. During a severe episode in 2010, Ottley lost the ability to understand speech. But music was “crystal clear,” he says, “so I started writing music”.

“The sound I was hearing was 97 instruments. I wanted a string family of 50 players, a bass clarinet, a bassoon.” This would become the overture to the symphonic soundtrack to the book, with tumultuous crescendos falling to wailing laments; recorded by the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra and the 40-voice Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno, it is the sound of psychosis.



Ottley, who has synaesthesia, says music makes him ‘see lots of shapes’.

“If you start creating an orchestral sound in your head and you’re becoming unwell and you tip into psychosis, you can actually hear it like it’s out there. It’s a 68-part fugue that is meant to represent the clamour of noise in a person’s head, whether it is multiple voices or any other kind of auditory hallucination that is happening, and just becomes unbearable and you just want it to stop.”

A couple of years later, keeping a recovery journal after another serious episode, he wrote the poem which would become the text of The Tree of Ecstasy. “It just sort of dropped out of the universe.”

The music took two years to compose, and the 74 artworks took three years to paint. Together it is a towering work for adults and children; a luminous, intense and ultimately beautiful journey through the stages of psychosis, and out the other side. “I wanted to create a metaphorical experience that goes straight to the emotional centres, to give people a visceral experience of what it feels like,” Ottley says.

“I think the arts are a direct conduit to our deeper emotional thinking that bypasses logical, superficial thinking, and can get right at the heart of what we feel about something.”

Ottley’s aim is to destigmatise mental illness, to illuminate the experience of those who don’t live with bipolar disorder and advocate for those who do. “Probably the message is that it cannot be about judgment,” he says. “I think all things can be achieved through empathy. I encourage people not to feel humiliated about those aspects of their life, or the thoughts they have around self-harm or harming others. To be really, really open from a very early stage about these things. Because of the deep shame that surrounds these things people just remain closed until it is too late.



‘I wanted to create a metaphorical experience that goes straight to the emotional centres, to give people a visceral experience.’

“You can get a diagnosis, you can get treatment. Go out into the world and find the people you need to talk to, and ask for their forgiveness for your behaviours, and forgive yourself as well. The condition doesn’t go away, but life goes on and you can find peace.”

Creativity has always been Ottley's salvation – “I could always turn to that” – but it is the love of his partner and friends that has brought him to relative tranquility.

Likewise, his book ends with his protagonist hearing the distant voices of those who loved him calling him back.

“I am here” he called. And so he came back into the world. And still the Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness was within him. And still it grew flowers. And still it bore fruit.

Higgie, Jennifer ‘Writer, illustrator, musician and composer’ *The Saturday Paper* No 390, March 12–18, 2022

<<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/culture/books/2022/03/12/writer-illustrator-musician-and-composer-matt-ottley/164700360013483#hrd>>

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BOOKS
The latest book by the award-winning writer, illustrator, musician and composer Matt Ottley is a stunning exploration of mental illness. By *Jennifer Higgie*.

Writer, illustrator, musician and composer Matt Ottley



Matt Ottley. CREDIT: TINA WILSON

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2024: Matt Ottley

In Matt Ottley's latest picture book, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*, a boy goes on a journey. Or rather, as with so many journeys, it's imposed upon him and he has to deal with it as best he can.

The boy is born with a seed inside him that grows into a tree of ambivalent power. At times it entwines and chokes him: it will not let him breathe. Doctors prescribe medicine, which works for a while, but then the tree, once again, takes over. To escape its grip, the boy shrinks and shrieks. He shapeshifts into a lizard, a flying cow and a bird that drifts into the realm of a maniacal sovereign who banishes him to the far reaches of her kingdom in search of beauty.

By the end of the tale, after starting and surviving a war, the boy – by now a young man – achieves a level of equilibrium and hope: he has learnt to understand the fragility of all things. The tree is still with him but golden fruit and flowers bloom from its gnarled branches. A jubilant voice sings to the heavens: "I am still here, hear me."

Like the ever-changing world Ottley evokes, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* is an intricate at times heart-rending work formed of many parts. Talking to me via Zoom from his home on the side of a mountain in Bundjalung country in northern New South Wales, Ottley – a deeply thoughtful man with long white hair – describes it as a "multimodal" project.

The publication comes with a CD recording of the book that is narrated by his partner, Tina Wilson, over a swooping, soaring 50-minute score composed by Ottley and the Perth pianist Alf Demasi. The narrative is incomplete without this sonic evocation of terror and joy, which is performed by the Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno. The uplifting final words "I am still here", for example, are sung by a tenor and not included in the book.

Ottley is a polymath: an author, artist, composer and musician who is best known for the 40 or so books for children and young adults he has illustrated, written, or both. A story of resilience through acceptance, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* is intended for anyone over the age of 15. In particular, it's for anyone who has suffered or is suffering from mental illness. It's also for readers who would like to understand more deeply what it means to encounter the world through the lens of such isolating – and at times exhilarating – pain.

Ottley writes from bone-deep experience. He was diagnosed with type 1 bipolar disorder in his early teens. A lifelong illness that manifests in mood swings, manic episodes and psychosis, Ottley's condition was not properly treated until he was in his 40s. For far too long, he was left, in the main, to fend for himself.

As a result he went through periods of deep depression. He twice attempted suicide. During one extreme episode, he could not speak or comprehend words; only music made sense. He wrote *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* in the hope that someone suffering might read it "and see metaphorically there's your journey. If you're unable to talk about it, there's solace in the discovery that you're not alone." He takes a deep breath. "My story," he says, "is not uncommon. I've met people my own age who have been on the run for a large part of their life."

Ottley was born in 1962 in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. His Australian mother, Jacqueline Johnston, pursued a patrol officer to Kukukuku country when she was only 18. Ottley isn't sure how she got there – it was a closed-off territory – but family lore has it she stowed away in a supply aircraft. The relationship didn't work. She met someone else and had three boys. Ottley is the middle child.

Jennifer Higgin is a London-based Australian writer. Her most recent book is *The Mirror and the Palette: 500 Years of Women's Self-Portraits*.

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The family settled in Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands, where there was “something of a mini goldrush”. Despite the volatility of his parents’ relationship, Ottley describes a childhood rich in creativity and wonder. His mother was a painter who had once aspired to be a ballerina, and she filled their home with music and took her children on painting trips. She made Ottley a small easel and, from the age of four, he made pictures alongside her as his brothers played.

“My story is not uncommon. I’ve met people my own age who have been on the run for a large part of their life.”

He remembers watching sing-sings in villages, entranced by the Melanesian music and men in bird-of-paradise plumes leaping high and playing the kundu drums. When he was about six he had malaria, which possibly triggered his synaesthesia. He sees “colours and shapes associated with sound”, which means he understands sound through what he can see rather than what he hears. When he listens to Mozart’s *Jupiter Symphony*, for instance, it creates “a coloured, football shape with things coming off it”. “In a rehearsal,” he tells me, “I can tell someone their F is a bit flat because it’s the wrong colour.” An oboe is “on the red/orange spectrum”, while the “strings can be grey through to chocolate”.

At the age of nine, while the family was still living in PNG, Ottley was sexually assaulted. He has decided, after years of silence, to discuss the repercussions of what happened to him as he believes “these things need to be talked about”. I ask him if he feels the abuse triggered his first bipolar episode, which occurred when he was 13, just after the family moved to Australia. He agrees it’s possible, explaining the illness “is a biochemical issue that is genetic but can remain switched off. Deep trauma can switch it on.”

Life in Sydney was difficult. Ottley felt estranged from the society he had arrived in: he missed his friends, had no knowledge of popular culture or television and was more interested in Beethoven than Skyhooks. Also, he says, the complete lack of respect for elders – so different to what he had witnessed in the land of his birth – affected him deeply. But his alienation wasn’t simply about geography. “I can’t distinguish whether my sense as an outsider was to do with leaving PNG or having a very serious mental illness,” he says.

He failed high school because when he became episodic, he would disappear into his room and try to ride it out. His mother was loving but did not understand what he was going through. Neither did his father and his uncles, who were “hard-drinking practical men; men’s men”. One was an Olympic boxer, another a wrestler, and their conversation revolved around cattle stations and horses. Ottley left Sydney and found work as a jackaroo.

On his return from the bush, he enrolled in the Julian Ashton Art School; after another stint jackarooing, he studied creative writing and music at Wollongong University. Here he met the writer Rodney Hall, who became a lifelong mentor and friend. Hall opened Ottley’s eyes to the possibilities of composition, contemporary literature and visual arts. This was when Ottley fell in love with the paintings of Brett Whiteley and Albert Tucker. Later he was entranced by the fantastical worlds conjured by Kirill Chelushkin and Shaun Tan.

When I ask him what it was about these artists, in particular, that attracted him, his answer is swift and clear. “It was the edginess and the wild emotionality contained in the most beautiful technique” – words that describe his own exquisitely detailed paintings. Discussing the role of influence, he paraphrases Igor Stravinsky, who believed that new music emerges when composers try and fail to ape the compositions from the past they admire. I agree that much

creativity involves someone getting it wrong in order to get it right. Ottley nods: "It's a beautiful encapsulation of how art evolves."

He found deep solace in music, in particular his discovery of the work of the Hungarian-Austrian composer György Ligeti, which reminded him of Melanesian music. I ask him about the correspondences. He thinks for a moment, his hands carving shapes in the air, as if he's conducting celestial musicians. He slowly explains that the similarities lie in the "atmospheric dissonance" of both musical forms, and how, in both Ligeti's compositions and in Melanesian songs, the structure is "linear in nature", not "circular like sonata": a mood slowly builds that "doesn't indicate where it's headed". What links them, he says, is "a deep sense of numinous mystery". Ottley was hooked and gravitated to the Eastern European contemporary music scene.

Despite his immersion in an urban, creative life, without graduating, Ottley once again upped sticks and worked as a stockman at a remote cattle station in the far north of Australia – which he did intermittently for the next 10 years. Worn out by his illness, he felt he had to curry favour with his father in order to expunge his deep sense of shame and failure. Years later – after Ottley had made a good living as an equestrian artist in Britain and published books such as *What Faust Saw*, about a dog that sees aliens that hide when humans appear – he returned to his experiences in the bush with his first major "multimodal" work, *Requiem for a Beast*.

A harrowing graphic novel that opens with the proclamation "It's our memories that make us", it's accompanied by a heart-rending soundtrack that combines excerpts from a 12th-century requiem, a composition for chamber orchestra and soprano, and Bundjalung narration and songs. It explores themes that are at once mythic and all too real: a young stockman's journey of self-discovery as he tackles a feral bull, and an Aboriginal woman sharing her memories of the Stolen Generations.

Ottley drew not only on the masculine toxicity and vicious racism he had encountered on the stations but also on his friendship with a Bundjalung elder who gave him permission to recount her story. "Auntie Pauline believed that the original invaders of this country were so afraid of us, the only way they could cope was to control us with violence," he says. "The bull becomes representative of early-settler control of the country." But the bull also "represented my illness and this relationship with my father that I needed to kill, basically".

Over the past 10 years or so, Ottley has found peace and stability. He and Tina Wilson live on 10 hectares of land on the side of a lush mountain. His focus is on creating work that is at once therapeutic and mind-expanding. In 2014, he and the writer Danny Parker devised the ongoing project *The Sound of Picture Books*, a live performance that brings picture books to life via words, images and music, that has been performed annually in Western Australia through The Literature Centre.

His 2020 picture book, *How to Make a Bird* (with Meg McKinlay), was the winner of the Children's Book Council of Australia's Picture Book of the Year award and joint winner of the Prime Minister's Award for Children's Literature. He's also working on another interactive project, *The Shape of Music*, a synaesthetic performance that invites musicians to develop their spatial awareness and improvisation techniques.

Given the intertwining of words, images and music in his work, I ask if he has any plans to turn his books into animations. He shakes his head: "Possibly, but for now it's really important that the viewer has time to look at and reflect upon the paintings." We talk about how swift and hyperstimulated contemporary life is, how little space there is for reflection.


He pauses for a moment and asks if I know Max Richter's *Sleep* – an eight-and-a-half-hour composition from 2015 that's been described as "music to dream to". I do. We agree it's wonderful. Ottley shakes his head in awe. "It's the most beautiful statement against the speed and superficiality of the way we experience life." He pauses, smiles, suddenly looks happy. "I love that."

Lifeline 13 11 14 ●

This article was first published in the print edition of *The Saturday Paper* on Mar 12, 2022 as 'Agony and ecstasy'.

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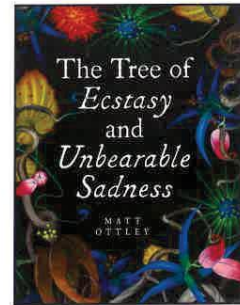
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Appendix B. Reviews

Lawn, Joy 'Review: *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness*' Magpies: Talking About Books for Children Vol 37, No 1, March 2022, p 10.

MAGPIES VOLUME THIRTY-SEVEN



The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness (2022)
Matt Ottley, Dirt Lane Press, 136pp.
978 0 64802385 2 \$39.99 Hb

Matt Ottley has drawn on his capacious and renowned artistic and musical virtuosity to bare his heart and mind in his monumental life's work, **The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness**. This illustrated work is gloriously executed, although it is both excruciating and enlightening to read. It portrays a boy born with a seed that made him see things invisible to others. It may be a gift. His gift showed him things so beautiful they made him cry. But it also tormented him with the pain of others. The seed becomes a tree whose flowers represent ecstasy and fruit, sadness. The extremes of emotion manifested by these progenies follow him into young manhood. He plummets into surreal nightmare scenes that almost destroy him but continues to seek the beauty that restores and uplifts him. Ottley acknowledges that some of the young man's experiences come from his own life but he writes in third person to create some distance, perhaps to protect himself, as well as the reader. His art here is, as always, magnificent, employing different styles and media. Sepia becomes full colour; delicacy becomes sumptuousness; shadow and silhouette become haunting characters; fragile yet supple line becomes fully realised three-dimensional space and, like the seed, genesis becomes metamorphosis, tempest and finally quietude. The book is a complete work of art in itself but Matt Ottley has also composed an impressive professional orchestral and choral piece that extends and enhances the artistry. **The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness** is recommended for readers 15 years and over. It is a seminal work that acknowledges and metaphorically inhabits and describes mental illness with tenderness and acuity. It is also for those who care enough to try to understand.
Review by Jay Lawn

One thing, that I can clearly see in the body of my work, since the mid 1990s, is the trajectory of what, till now, has been a private aspect of my life: my struggles with type 1 Bipolar Disorder. My latest work, TToE&US, is not exactly autobiographical, but it is based on my experiences of the psychotic episodes I have experienced. Stigma is, unfortunately, still very real: the 'othering' that happens, sometimes subtly, in the media is an example of its prevalence. I have been shunned by friends and family alike and in this work I wanted to give audiences a 'felt' artistic experience of what psychosis is like. That might sound scary, and at times the work probably is challenging, but I've also tried to imbue it with light and beauty. I want people to be moved by a sense of beauty, even if they can't understand what it's about. The story itself is a fantastical, *Alice in Wonderland*-like allegory. It is a truly multi-modal work in that the full meaning of the narrative can only be arrived at by experiencing both the book and the musical work. This doesn't necessarily need to happen at the same time, but aspects of the experience are at times only expressed in the music, or only in the words and images, and the combination of words, images and music create the full essence and substance of the work. This coming together of modes is fully expressed in the film I have made, which combines the music, images and a little footage of the orchestra, singer and choir.

The music, which is scored for a 97-piece orchestra, a 40-voice choir and a solo tenor singer, took me two years to write. I invited a musical colleague and friend, Alf Demasi to collaborate on part of the music as I wanted an external view of the subject, someone not deeply immersed in

it, but who understands me and cares deeply about the subject. Alf's contribution is only small, approximately 10% of the score, but it is important. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of the Gabby Arts Legacy Trust, the work was recorded in Europe by the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra and the Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno, with Australian singer Ben Reynolds, under British conductor Mikel Toms.

The 74 paintings in the book, which are a mixture of oil paintings, digital works that I then printed and worked over with pencil, charcoal, pen-and-ink and acrylic, took me three years to produce. The text had been written as a poem about ten years ago in a journal I kept during my recovery from a particularly debilitating episode.

This multi-modal work is a true masterpiece.

Matt concludes our interview by sharing what surprises him and what he hopes is one legacy of his books:

There isn't much that surprises me anymore apart from the constant astonishment I feel when I consider aspects of nature—the fact of a caterpillar forming a chrysalis around itself and then morphing into a completely different creature. No one has ever written a book or a piece of music that could ever be as astounding as that!

If my books can have furthered, in their small way, the cause of compassion and empathy, then it will all have been worthwhile.

<http://mattottley.com/>

<https://www.dirtlanepress.com/>

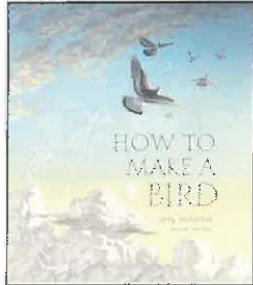
Alessandrino, M.H. ‘The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness (Matt Ottley, Dirt Lane)’ Books + Publishing 1 December 2021

<<https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2021/12/01/206480/review-the-tree-of-ecstasy-and-unbearable-sadness/>>

An author, visual artist and composer, Matt Ottley has combined his talents in his latest work to create a multi-modal sensory feast that merges words, art and music. Bold and immersive, *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* is an allegory for the experience of psychosis, following the main character’s progression from the discovery of the disease to surrender and eventually self-acceptance. The central character is a boy who experiences both beauty and despair in a debilitating way. Doctors tell him that there is a tree growing inside of him and that this tree blooms flowers of ecstasy and bears fruits of sadness. Eventually giving in to the power of the tree, the boy finds himself in another realm, where he embarks on a quest to discover meaning and uncover beauty, exploring the fragility of life and the devastating nature of humankind along the way. The journey has an *Alice in Wonderland*-esque feel and unfolds through seven stages, from genesis to quietude, each reflecting the boy’s mental state. Ottley has created a multilayered and thought-provoking narrative that unfolds in a cross-section of ways, encouraging readers to delve below the surface and uncover deeper meaning. His stunning artwork enhances the simple poetic language and the accompanying musical score (included as a CD within the book) adds a further layer to the story, making the book a highly emotive experience for the reader. Tackling a difficult subject and bringing to the forefront conversations around mental health, this is a longform picture book, uniquely its own, appropriate for an older audience of those aged 15 and up.

Paterson, Allison '[Review] McKinlay, Meg and Matt Ottley (How to Make a Bird)'
Magpies: Talking About Books for Children Vol 35, No 5, November 2020, p 16.

MAGPIES VOLUME THIRTY-FIVE



How to Make a Bird (2020)
 Meg McKinlay & Matt Ottley,
 Walker Books, 32pp.
 978 1 92538189 4 \$25.99 Hb

Reviewed by Allison Paterson

Birds ... captivating and curious, they are delightful to watch in their busy day, soaring high on updrafts, swirling in the skies and forming giant arrows as they collectively gather in the sky.

I confess that birds and books are two of several time-passing delights that frequent my life. As birds intrigue me, so did the title of this book well before I had the pleasure of unveiling it from its package. Firstly, how do you make a bird? Secondly, it's also the title of the acclaimed YA book by Martine Murray. Finally, it's a book created by Meg McKinlay and Matt Ottley ... my expectations soared!

As with all books, I began with a study of the cover, the birds and title stood out against the sky in their glossy UV spot finish. Inviting closer study were the fine white and translucent lines also finished in the same way. As I rub my hand over the surface, I discover the sketched and labelled designs of a bird which move up the page to follow the ascending birds into the sky. I flip to the back cover and these are the first words I read:

*Breathe deeply
 and take your time.
 The making of a bird
 is not a thing to be hurried
 ...*

At this point, I knew this book was one of those special ones—thought-provoking, challenging and an absolute delight to explore.

I open the cover to a title page reminiscent of the notebooks of the great Leonardo da Vinci, specifically his designs for a flying machine. I pause to study them. The shiver of intrigue builds ... what will this book be? I turn the page.

Here is a lone child perched on a wooden chest gazing out through casement windows. The sun is rising, casting long shadows and washing the walls of her sparse bedroom with tones of pink. The room and its contents depict an undetermined period of time, the white-washed walls and timber frames reflect 'old English cottage', but there are hints of a curious child of today. To my surprise, a few pages in, I discover the child's home is constructed of corrugated iron, perched high on stilts on a patch of sand, perhaps an island. A lone bird flies across the sky. The landscape is devoid of all vegetation. There is the vast ocean and sky as far as the eye can see. The child has a bird's-eye view across the ocean from her home.

Exploring a basket and suitcase of collected things—the bones, shells and feathers that have washed up from the ocean—the child picks out the items you will need to make a bird. Look carefully, you may be surprised by what you see. Then the child studies the design, carefully creating the bird, laying out the bones, adding feathers, and with imagination, adding its beating heart, its eyes, beak and claws.

*Take these bones
 And arrange them into a bird-shape.
 Any bird-shape will do—
 The proud arch of an eagle,
 The soft curve of a sparrow.*

But then there is more to making a bird than those physical things. There's the magical moment when you breathe life into your creation, and the bitter-sweet point in time when you let your bird go and allow it to soar. The imagery is breathtaking. I smile as I close the cover and the intrigue has not dissipated. I was sure this book had a back story of its own and I needed to know it.

Meg McKinlay, in a blog written in 2016, reveals it was the year of 2003, as an aspiring writer

combing *Magpies Magazine* for reviews, when she came across a title *How to Make a Bird* (Martine Murray).

Instantly, I was a mix of excitement and regret. For I knew exactly what this book must be—a slightly weird, lyrical picture book about someone trying to build a bird from raw materials, about the tangible and the intangible, maybe even the existential. And oh, how I wished I had written it. It felt like a perfect fit for me, rightfully mine somehow. If only I'd had the idea first.

Oh, well. Resigned to my frustration, I read the actual review. And realised the book wasn't at all what I'd imagined. It was a Young Adult novel and there was no actual bird building—there were metaphorical birds only. My idea was mine! I could still write it! I wrote it—a slightly weird, lyrical picture book about ... you get the idea.

I sent it off. Some publishers loved it. Some gave it the 'back slowly away from me please' side-eye. All of them rejected it. It was too weird, too quiet, too something-or-other. It didn't really work for children. It was hard to see who the market was. Lovely language, but ...

As this story reminds us, sometimes you need to 'breathe deeply and take your time'. Just as the making of a bird should not be hurried, neither should the making of a book. *How to Make a Bird* was eventually published in a collection of short stories and now, thirteen years on, it has a new life as a picture book, just as Meg had always imagined.

With captivating imagery, *How to Make a Bird* reads as a prose poem which is gentle and delightful to read aloud. The story leads the reader through a process that, on the superficial level, is the imagi-

native creation of a living bird, the book can simply be read this way for early childhood readers. For older readers there is much to contemplate, for this is an allegorical story of any creative process, from the seed of the idea, the journey of physical development, and finally the releasing of the creation into the world. How does it feel to create something of your own and reveal it to others? How do parents feel when they create new life and eventually release their child into the adult world?

A partnership between two of Australia's award-winning creators of literature for children was sure to be a successful collaboration. Matt Ottley combines the effective use of space, line and colour across breathtaking double-page spreads. The masterful use of light and shadow creates a sense of a vast world, a lonely world for the child, but also one of freedom. Matt's choice of a muted palette is lifted with bursts of colour—the blue of the child's dress, of the vast sky and ocean; the green of the suitcase of treasured items, and the combined colours of the bird. There is an enchanting sense of wonder and much to explore beginning with the cover and the end papers, and with every turn of the page. The book invites returned readings where readers will discover something new every time.

I was right, this book is one of those special ones to explore and treasure, and one that has its own serendipitous story of creation.

On the final page I find Meg's poetic dedication:
*To all the makers out there ...
 to everyone who has the courage
 to breathe life and let go.*

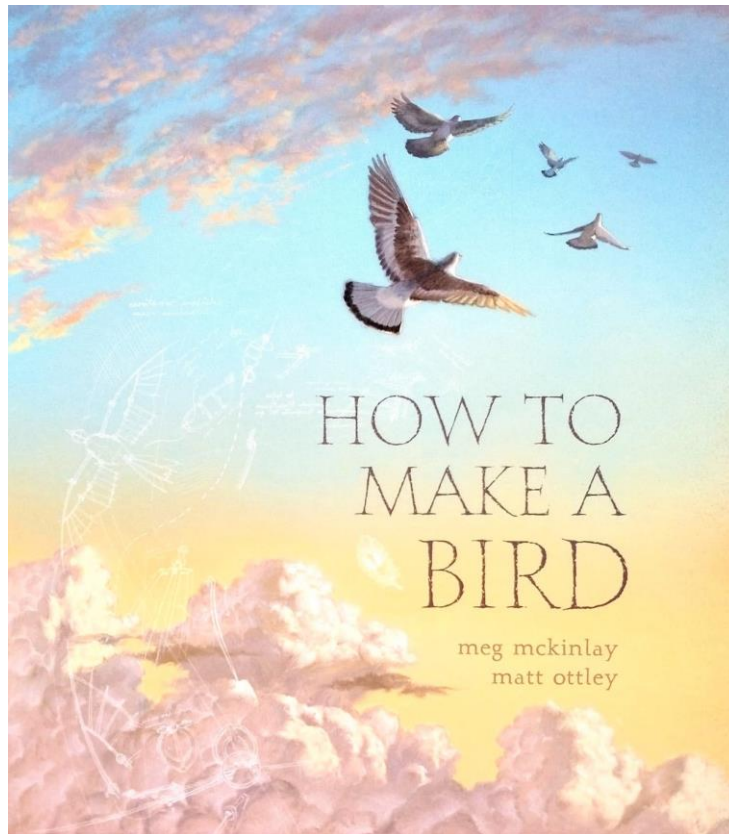
Thanks to the creators of *How to Make a Bird* for breathing life into this book and letting it go. I think it will stretch its wings and soar!



SIXTEEN

Bragaru, Natalia '[Review: *How To Make a Bird*]' *Kids Book Explorer*
<<https://www.kidsbookexplorer.com/how-to-make-a-bird-meg-mckinlay-matt-ottley/>>

“How to Make a Bird” with the power of imagination by Meg McKinlay and Matt Ottley



So much of the beauty of this life rests in sadness, in acceptance that all of this is going to pass.

Meg McKinlay

Table Of Contents

The title of this book [“How to Make a Bird” shortlisted for CBCA 2021 Book of the Year Award](#), conjured up a memory of my 10-year-old self and my grandpa on the roof of his house. Grandpa is fixing a loose roof tile and I am sitting next to him. As I stare out into the distant blue sky I can feel a light breeze on my face, I close my eyes and with outstretched arms imagine myself soaring like a bird among the clouds. Years later that daydream returned in the form of a sweet *deja vu* when my toddler child declared that he wanted to fly like a bird. Together we drew plans and made wings from

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2024: Matt Ottley

sticks and bedsheets, lovingly pieced together with glue, string, imagination and a generous measure of infectious wide-eyed enthusiasm...

“How to Make a Bird” – The Review

“How to Make a Bird” starts with a desire and a comparable hands-on construction project to make a bird. A young girl uses whatever she can find in her environment – bones, stones, feathers and methodically assembles it, not forgetting *“a heart that beats faster than any human heart”*. But when the physical bird is built the child concedes that it is nothing more than *“this silent, still, shape of a bird, cold as a statue”* and that she needs to give it something else that will make it fly, something that is not from the physical realm. Once this ‘something’ is found, the girl sees her bird *“tremble as it fills, inside its tiny, racing heart, with the dreams only a bird can dream”* and eventually it soars leaving the girl alone at the open window. Imagine you are that girl...

"And feel your slowly beating heart fill

with a kind of sadness,

a kind of happiness.

For this is when you will know

that you have really made a bird."

This story’s genre is prose-poem. Both lyrical and poetic, its poignant words and melodious lines float harmoniously in a constellation of metaphors. [Meg McKinlay tells](#) of her being influenced by the Japanese aesthetics and philosophical ideas of the floating world. The latter, known as *ukiyo*, contemplates (amongst other things) daily life as ephemeral and evanescent – an illusion, a transitory reality. One of the Japanese characters used to write “uki” (憂世) means “sorrow” or “melancholy”. And melancholy is what this book evokes when the bird disappears forever, leaving us both sad and happy.

“How to Make a Bird” is an ode to creative expression. The creative process can never rely on mechanical skill alone, it needs something more, something that’s hard to define with words, but carries with it some part of the artist’s heart and soul. And only work imbued with this enigmatic quality goes soaring high into the world and touches the hearts and souls of others. As with any good story, one can read other things into it and find one’s individual meaning and truth.

For example, I identify with it as a parent of a beautiful boy, whose entire world revolved around the attention and love of his mum. That same boy is

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration 2024: Matt Ottley

now a teenager who is notably distanced and interested in his friends' company far more than that of mine. Having put my heart and soul into raising him, I will reluctantly have to let him fly from the nest and discover his own way in life which fills my heart with the very same *"kind of sadness and a kind of happiness"* that this story speaks about; the sadness of losing that togetherness we once shared and the happiness of seeing him grow up and become his own person.

Meg McKinlay – The Author

[Meg McKinlay](#) is an Australian author, writing for both children and adults and presently living in Freemantle in Western Australia. Her writing ranges from picture books, chapter books and young adult novels to poetry. *"I had always been the girl who focused quietly on the spine of a leaf while other kids ran around squealing,"* [reminisced Meg of her childhood](#). Before becoming a writer she has worked as a teacher, translator and even a swimming instructor. Meg has a PhD in Japanese Literature and taught Australian Literature and Japanese at the University of Western Australia.

Matt Ottley – The Illustrator

[Matt Ottley](#) who illustrated "How to Make a Bird" is a fascinating creative persona, a modern-day Renaissance man. He writes, illustrates and also sets some picture books and poetry to the scores of his own music composed for small chamber orchestras and soprano singers.

For me creativity is creativity. I've never made much of a distinction between painting and writing music and from my earliest memories I have always created music in my imagination.

Matt Ottley

The musical accompaniments that Matt composes range in style from classical to rock, blues and jazz. Matt devised "The Sound of Picture Books" program to help people relate to ways that words, images and music can combine for a richer sensory experience. It is a collaboration between Matt (illustrator & composer) with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, The Literature Centre and Yamaha Music, and entails a series of multi-modal workshops that brings Matt's published books to life. The examples and excerpts of his brilliant works can be browsed on [Matt Ottley's website](#). Matt's illustrations for "How to Make a Bird" (which you can browse at your leisure below) permits one into the girl's beautiful world, "bringing it to gorgeous life" [as Meg McKinlay put it](#). He can illustrate air in a way that makes you breathe deeper to inhale the freshness of it and vast open spaces in a way that makes you want to jump inside this picture book and sink your toes in the sands of a sunset beach.

I fell in love with this book at first sight of its title page, which shows the drawing plans for constructing a bird that looks like something Leonardo DaVinci would have drawn in his famous Notebooks of the Renaissance era. Enjoy browsing the illustrations below but be assured that photos do not do it justice. If there's a picture book you contemplate buying I suggest this should be the one.

PS: So, I hear you ask, what happened to your son's birdwing project? Did he take flight like the bird in this story? Indeed he did. For the next week, he ran around the backyard flapping his bedsheet wings, squawking and soaring like a bald eagle. And although those precious little feet never left the ground, his head was soaring in the clouds. He had become the bird. Imagination is a powerful thing, it seeds the creative process of writers, artists and musicians, their creations growing like children with who they nurture and form a strong protective attachment. At some stage, they too have to set their creations free and send them out into the world to see if they will fly or fall short. It takes courage. You want to protect your children, but it's only when you let go that they can grow and shine a light on the world. I'm glad Meg and Matt decided to let this collaborative creation take flight, and I'm delighted to shine a little light on this moving story.

Title: How to Make a Bird

Author: Meg McKinlay

Illustrator: Matt Ottley

Publisher: Walker Books Australia

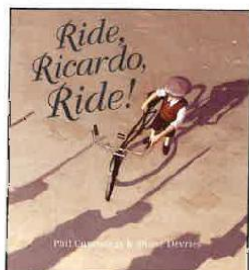
Publication Date: 20 October 2020

ISBN: 9781925381894

NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS

NUMBER ONE - MARCH 2015

PICTURE BOOKS FOR OLDER READERS



The use of comic book style panels, a gentle colour palette and well-chosen words make this story of war and loss also a story of hope and survival. There is a lot to explore in this evocative and inspiring picture book based on a true story making it perfect for classroom discussion as well as personal reading. Recommended for school and public library collections. *Tina Cavanough*

Teacup (2015)
Rebecca Young, ill. Matt Ottley,
Scholastic Press, 32pp.
978 1 74362 384 8 \$24.99 Hb

Set in a Western European village, Ricardo's story starts with light, warm colours and the innocent shadows of trees, the old men of the village and his bike. As the shadows become more sinister, showing soldiers and guns, bombers and fighter planes, the illustrations become darker, greyer. Ricardo and his family are forced indoors and into hiding, with Ricardo's isolation and sadness depicted through the use of perspective and blank space. As the war ends, colour comes back into the illustrations, with renewal represented by the appearance of a new puppy. Although Ricardo has aged, with the help of his bike, he is able to recapture the happiness of his boyhood.

It is a special experience to pour over any book illustrated by Matt Ottley. For **Teacup** he has worked in oils painted on canvas. His depictions of clouds, sky, water and light are sublime, and a signature of his work. His imaginative motifs, use of colour and texture, composition and camera angles are a master class in art and visual literacy. The originals are large, over a metre wide, and will be exhibited in Perth or Sydney. The illustrations are perfectly paired with the words by Rebecca Young, author of **Button Boy** and **The Skunk with No Funk**. Here she has

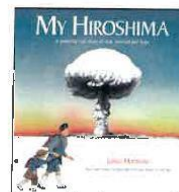


employed a sparse style that allows the impact of her story to resonate with readers.

The bones of the tale concern a lone boy who embarks on a journey across the ocean talking with him only a few possessions; the most important of which is a teacup filled with earth from his home. It, in turn, nurtures another potent image that develops as he braves the seas. Nature and the elements kindle memories: the albatross of flying kites and the clouds of *how things can change with a whisper*. His journey is fraught but also full of wonder. Readers will wonder where a book titled **Teacup** will take them. A boy who is forced to leave home and sets out to sea in a small wooden boat is

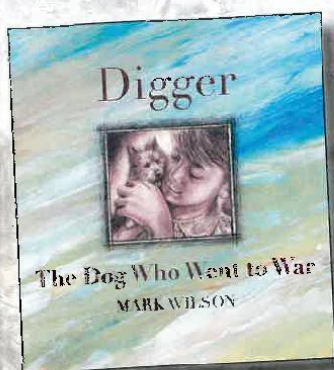
a subtle, but powerful, allegory of the dispossessed seeking a new life with little other than hope. The teacup and what it contains is a potent talisman in this rightly significant work.
Joy Lawn

REISSUE OF NOTE



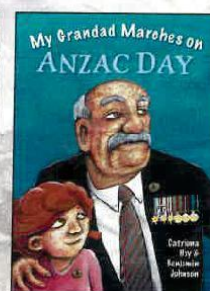
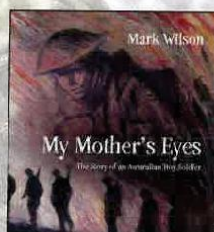
My Hiroshima (1987/2015)
Junko Morimoto, Lothian Children's Books, 978 0 7344 1602 5 \$15.99 Pb
Junko Morimoto's justly famous autobiographical picture book **My Hiroshima** has been reprinted. To re-read it remains a powerful experience. In understated words, and pictures that start the book as recollections of life before WWII before moving into life during the war are followed by the description of the nuclear bomb detonating over Hiroshima with its horrific aftermath that lasted for decades. As powerful today as it was when first published in 1987 **My Hiroshima** remains a potent warning of the dangers of nuclear warfare.

LEST WE FORGET



From some of Australia's finest storytellers come these moving stories of bravery, friendship and family. Filled with beautiful imagery, each holds a message we should never forget.

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CHILDREN'S BOOKS

‘[Review: *Teacup*]’ *Kirkus Reviews*

<<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/rebecca-young/teacup/>>

In a book that combines short, poetic sentences with dramatic visual art, a light-skinned boy, needing a new home, sets off to sea in a rowboat.

As the boy begins his odyssey, his knapsack contains only “a book, a bottle, and a blanket. In his teacup he held some earth from where he used to play.” Vast expanses of sea and sky are conveyed both in monumental oil paintings and by the white or colored negative space of some double-page spreads. The text and artwork complement each other to produce a journey that combines elements of reality and dreamlike images. The palette ranges from pale to vibrant, and details are striking—the boy’s lengthening hair, sun dappling a birch. Ominous clouds never become horrific; hardships such as hunger are not addressed. The rhythm of the text, as well as its gentle alliterations and occasional rhymes, makes it an excellent bedtime read-aloud. There is poignancy—and mystery—in “how things can change with a whisper.” Why did the boy leave his beloved home? Readers are never told, making this book a potent discussion starter. The care given to both art and text elevate the simplicity of the life-is-a-journey-fraught-with-uncertainty message. The delightful results of his determination to hold onto his soil-filled teacup and an unexpectedly sweet ending add to that message the notion that those who strive and dream will eventually thrive.

Enchanting, beautiful, and full of hope.

Ormerod, Jan ' Review: *Requiem for a Beast* ' *Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults* Vol 16, No 1, Autumn 2008, pp 41–42.

jan ormerod

*requiem for a
beast*

by matt ottley
(lothian books, 2007
9780734407962 \$39.95hb)

Australia has been producing cutting edge picture books for young adults for many years. Now Matt Ottley has created a work that breaks rules and creates new standards of excellence. *Requiem for a Beast* is an ambitious work of depth, subtlety and beauty, remarkable in the way it draws a multi layered concept into a cohesive whole, using word, image and music. Two stories are interwoven in a complex circular pattern of prose and visual text that reflects both the musical and poetic writing styles of the European Middle Ages, and talks of tragedy, regret and longing for reconciliation in rural Australia. *The Requiem* is the model for the form of the book, written in five parts, Part One, *Dies Irae* (Day of wrath), Part Two, *Mors Stupebit et Natura* (Death and Nature Stupefied), Part Three, *Lacrymosa* (Weeping), Part Four, *Pie Jesu* (Gentle Jesus) and Part Five, *Requiem* (Rest).

Requiem for a Beast was designed by Ottley as a genre crossover work for young adults and adults. He anticipates and deserves a high level of reader participation. An open mind assists in understanding that the complexity of the content demanded a form which is rich and various, and needs to be absorbed through repeated revisiting and thoughtful meditation. Throughout Ottley uses typefaces and tenses to identify and inhabit the voices of the two main protagonists, one a young stockman who pursues and captures a wild bull, the other an aboriginal elder recounting her experiences after removal from her family as part of the 'stolen generation'. Dream sequences and flashbacks further convolute this tightly crafted narrative, which is dynamic and inventive in its filmic sequences. Themes of racism, loss, judgement and forgiveness are played out within the masculine culture of Australia, where women's stories flow from reacting to the masculine.

The design of the opening and closing sections is elegant and cool and acts to contain, and contrast with, the turbulence and pain in the narrative. Throughout, Ottley has used several type faces and point sizes and precise placement to transform the prose text into visual content. Subtle word and image references point to the music, which ties the CD into the book as an integral part of the whole

The extraordinary CD of music for string quintet, piano, harpsichord, and three voices has two components. One is a deeply moving original composition by Ottley based on a section of Latin text from the European Middle Ages known as *The Requiem*, a meditation on reconciliation and resolution, speaking of reckoning for the past. This is interwoven with stories and songs from

41 Viewpoint 16 (1) Autumn 2008

the Bundjalung tradition, which express similar themes to those in the Latin text.

Part One *Dies Irae* is a famous thirteenth century Latin hymn describing the day of judgement the last trumpet summoning souls before the throne of God, where the saved will be delivered and the unsaved cast into eternal flames. Ottley begins this section of his work with five oil paintings depicting a gathering storm and darkening sky, a visual metaphor introducing the powerful theme of loss of knowledge and wisdom creating darkness in a way that leaves space for the reader to create meaning. Ottley's trust in the integrity of his readers is demonstrated repeatedly, as is his profound understanding of and empathy for those most affected by the stolen generation which only could have come after years of consultation, listening and learning. His character speaks for herself:

"It's our memories that make us. This country, these hills you see; this is my mother's country. And her mother's too. I'm supposed to be a fully initiated woman, but that knowledge, that memory, is gone."

Only an artist of Ottley's stature could depict his surreal dream sequences, turbulent weather, vast Australian landscapes, cattle drives, myth, legend and intimate human interaction with such aplomb and visual inventiveness. His mediums are oil paint and coloured pencil on canvas and paper. This work will appeal to fans of the graphic novel, music and art connoisseurs and lovers of horses, cattle and the men that work with them in the Australian landscape, but most of all those who love a rattling good yarn, dramatically and poetically told.

This is not a book that will reward the reader who wishes to overlay their reading with their own preconceptions. The reader must allow the words, images and music to inform and speak to them. It is a story that is challenging and confronting, but it is a story that has great value in its telling, great value in its reading and even greater value in its understanding.


The courage and commitment of this author, artist, composer and his peers in the publishing world in Australia, where the financial and critical rewards are meagre is remarkable. Please join me in cherishing and celebrating Matt Ottley and this magnificent contribution to the canon of World literature. Brava!

Jan Ormerod's most recent picture book is *Water Witcher*

The long-awaited fifth instalment
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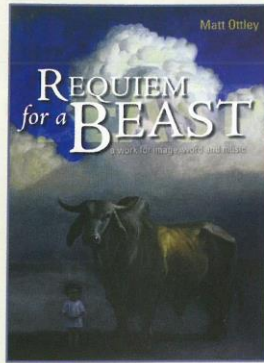
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NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS

NUMBER FOUR ~ SEPTEMBER 2007

Extending Readers

Books with mature themes for children and young adults with established reading skills ~ Content and concepts should be clear from the review. 🐦 indicates an Australian book.



Requiem for a Beast
Matt Ottley, Lothian Books,
978 0 7344 0796 2 \$39.95 Hb



This is a unique, deeply felt and very complex book for mature readers. Interwoven strands incorporate mythic, allegorical beasts, Indigenous race-memory of dispossession and longing for Country, a father guilt-ridden by a brutal deed from his past, a young jackaroo learning to deal with the realities of stock work and the rites of stockmen, and a subtle undertone of someone recovering from emotional trauma. It is almost impossible to briefly convey the complexity of storytelling going on here—this book and its accompanying CD needs to be read, listened to and pondered on.

Merely to isolate themes does not do the book justice, but perhaps readers could consider some of the following threads: the mythic power of the 'Beast'—Brahmin bull, Minotaur and Centaur—or humankind?; the sins of the fathers/past generations affecting their children; the effects of memory—or loss of cultural memory; guilty secrets and racism; the power of landscape to affect action or thought; the bravado of youth leading to terrible consequences; the redemptive power of compassion; and acceptance of responsibility. The power and meaning of the title are also conveyed through the Latin texts of the Requiem which is interwoven with Aboriginal words and song in a unique musical storyline.

Illustrations and text carry the multiple storylines in varied fonts and a range of styles, from painterly towering cloud formations looming over northern Australian landscapes and the majestic Brahmin bull, to graphic novel sketch boxes with hand-lettered text as well as a variety of typed fonts. This is a tour-de-force from Matt Ottley who has created a unique, complex tapestry of music, words, multiple stories, varied illustrations and rich paintings into a mysterious and powerful whole. A book to be read and re-read, savoured, considered and discussed.

Highly recommended for mature young adults and adult readers.
Chloë Maugher

Starfish Sisters

J.C. Burke, Random House,
978 1 74166 155 2 \$17.95 Pb



Of the elite surfers picked for a special training camp, four girls are assigned to the Starfish Bungalow. Courtney, or Ace as she is nicknamed, is the oldest. Beautiful, with an enviable boyfriend, and fully sponsored by Roxy, she is well aware of her star status. Georgie and Kia are already old friends—the former, a well-built girl who loves soccer and is having doubts about the pressures of com-

petitive surfing, and the latter, a talented designer of bikinis but emotionally insecure. The baby of the group is Micki, only twelve and the daughter of a drug addict who is Kia's dad's best friend. The plot, narrated by each in turn, traces the changes that occur within the girls over the three weeks, as a result of spending time with one another and surviving the pressures of competition. This novel is guaranteed to captivate teenage girls who enjoy the Australian beach culture. The technical surfing jargon is appealing and

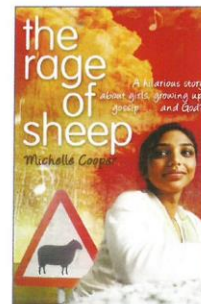
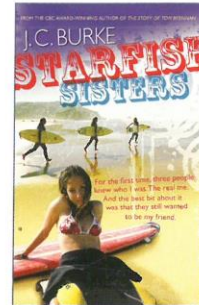
the scenario of girls as competent surfers instead of beach decorations is most refreshing. The author appears to have insider information, so credible are the dialogue and concerns of the four girls who make up the *Starfish Sisters*. The issues of mobile phones, boyfriends, body image and family relationships will be familiar to adolescent readers, and these are dealt with sympathetically. However, the story has a darker side: Micki has to cope with being a 'parent' to her no-hoper father, and has already faced the despair of not ever being able to believe his promises to reform. Kia's secret is that she is a self-mutilator. The author pulls no punches in her graphic description of Kia's actions and their potentially tragic consequences. However, it is somewhat disconcerting that the other girls agree to keep Kia's secret rather than inform an adult. Apart from this, the main quibble about the novel is that the girls' voices are sometimes indistinguishable and they are all fairly stock characters. That said, it is an enjoyable read, full of good humour and optimism.
Anne Briggs

The Rage of Sheep

Michelle Cooper, Random House,
978 1 74166 240 5 \$17.95 Pb



Hester is fifteen-years-old, it is 1984; she is growing up different, her mother from Fiji and her father Anglo-Australian, a religious family in a small country town where fitting in is critical to social survival. To compound Hester's problem her best friend has moved away and in her endeavour to please her new friends, Hester has to make personal choices that conflict with her own values. When reluctantly partnered with a religious zealot for her project on evolution and creationism, Hester begins to question her own values. Her journey of self-discovery comes to the crossroads when she discovers her English teacher is homosexual and has been unjustly treated. Hester is forced to decide to take the easy or difficult path. **The Rage of Sheep** is a meaningful contribution for Australian adolescents, exploring religious faith, friendship, homosexuality, peer alienation, gossip and growing up, all issues that are at the forefront of teenage concern. The symbolic reference to sheep at key points in the narrative creates opportunities



for reflection. The epigraph, *I am awe-struck and tremble, for the rage of sheep is truly awful* is a central focus, while the *religious flock* as praised by the church minister and Hester's teacher's reference to sheep and goats produce a blend of symbolic meaning. **The Rage of Sheep** is a light-hearted, humorous read that captures the teenage voice and experience of growing up in the Australia of the 1980's, while bestowing valuable life messages with expertise.
Allison Paterson

Blood Brothers

Peter Corris, Lothian Books,
978 0 7344 1006 1 \$17.95 Pb



Family histories, as fifteen-year-old Bart Fletcher ultimately learns, have a way of emerging in the present to affect people's lives in ways they could never imagine. When Bart's best friend, Jack, deliberately sets up a fall in a school touch football match that breaks his leg, Bart is unwittingly set on a journey that will climax with some astonishing home-truths about himself and family relationships. Like many older people in the barely disguised fictive Byrant Bay community, Bart's mother grew up in the hippie era and embraced the idealism and hedonism of the time. Now a teacher and single moth-

NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS

THIRTY-NINE

NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS NEW BOOKS

Gonis, Anastacia 'Review: Walker Classics: *Luke's Way of Looking*' *BuzzWords* 31 May 2012

<http://www.buzzwordsmagazine.com/2012/05/luke-way-of-looking.html>

Walker Classics: Luke's Way of Looking by Nadia Wheatley, illustrated by Matt Ottley (Walker Books)

PB RRP \$ 16.95

ISBN 9781921977725

Reviewed by Anastasia Gonis

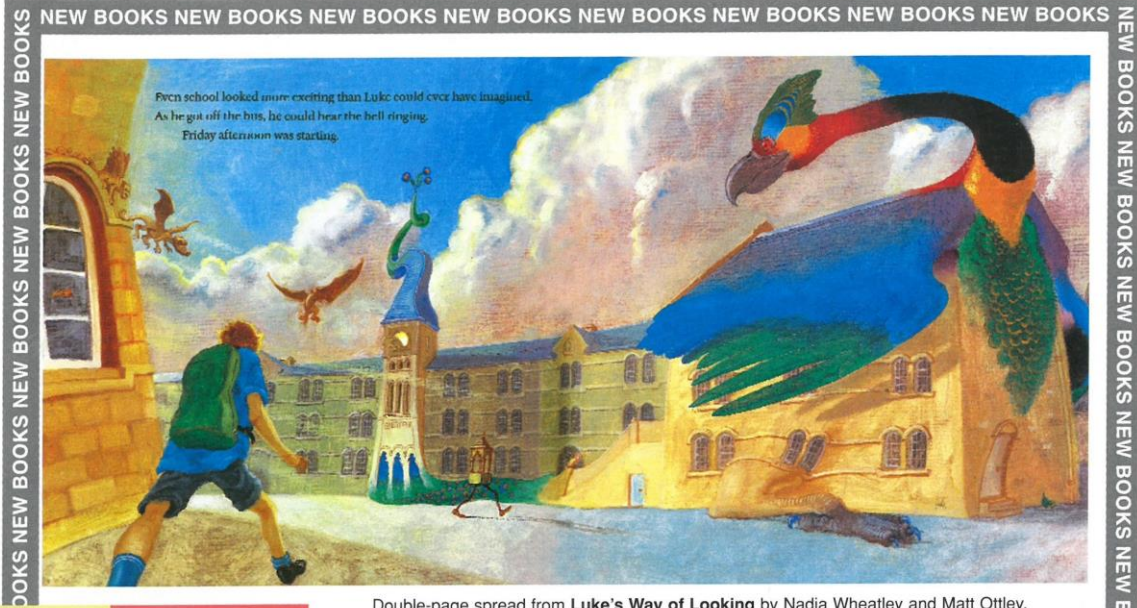
Reissued through Walker Classics, this is a poignant story with strong themes of a boy who sees the world differently and expresses it through his art. This causes him to be bullied and marginalized by his teacher and peers.

Being different makes Luke an outsider. He can't explain why he paints things in a way the teacher can't understand. His classmates mock him and he's friendless and alone.

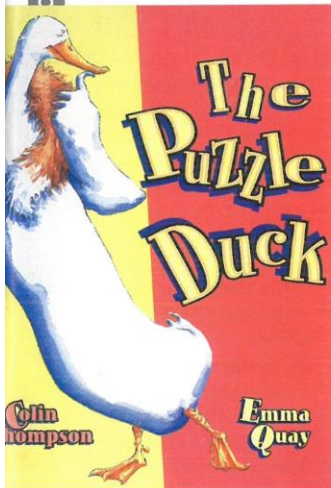
Luke decides not to go to school one day. He's tired of being laughed at and having his brushes broken by his angry teacher. He takes the opposite road and stays on a bus that passes a building which looks different to other buildings from the outside. When Luke goes in, he feels an immediate affinity with his abstract surroundings. He wonders what his teacher would think if he could see the different interpretations and styles of painting and art creations. Luke recognizes a separate place where everything his eyes look upon is beautiful.

Overflowing with happiness, Luke sets off for home. The world around him seems changed. The revelation that there is a place where he belongs has made him a new person. He decides to go to afternoon classes. Nothing bad can touch him now. When Luke starts to paint his way, the teacher remains silent.

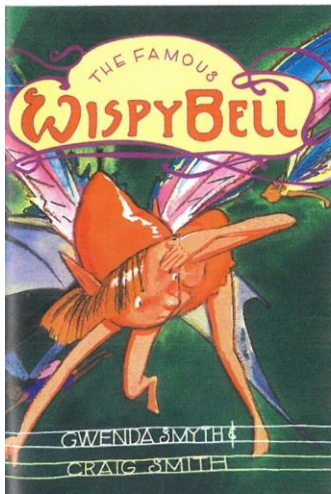
Matt Ottley has captured the essence of the text, and through his illustrations we can feel the emotions the boy and the teacher are feeling. Its colour-filled covers depict Luke joyously liberated and swinging from a tree branch amidst his abstract art. This was a CBCA Honour Book and is now another classic available again to a new audience of readers.



Double-page spread from *Luke's Way of Looking* by Nadia Wheatley and Matt Ottley, Hodder (1999)



MYSELF. When the wolf arrives at the pig's neat brick cottage in the city, Gilbert Alexander Pig decides the time has come to alter the story. 'What we need is some dialogue here,' he says. 'I'll listen to you. You listen to me... We'll negotiate a solution so we can BOTH be happy.' And that's what they do: they learn to live together, they share the work and take turns at playing the trumpet. One can imagine a very different Tony Ross version where the wolf fails to keep his side of the bargain because a wolf *cannot change his spots*, but Gael's purpose is not subversion, and her story is aimed at considerably older children than those who enjoy the clear-cut black and white morality of the traditional story. Her's is a tale designed to stimulate discussion about racism and conflict resolution: it's an 'issues' book but it is saved from becoming too heavy in hand first by David Cox's cheerful, racy, scribbly illustrations bursting out of their frames, secondly by the relaxed storytelling mode of narrative, and lastly by the sheer unexpectedness of the twist in the tale with its deliberate use of jargon like 'options' or 'dialogue'.
Moira Robinson



The Famous Wispy Bell, Gwendolyn Smyth, ill. Craig Smith, Lothian, 0 85091 760 3 \$22.95 Hb

While many little girls dream of being fairy princesses and dancing on waterlily leaves, the greatest wish of this particular fairy princess, Wispy Bell, is to be human, eat peanut butter sandwiches and wash with soap. Her wishes initially fall on deaf ears as the Fairy King and Queen and the rest of the fairy kingdom either ignore or dismiss them as a passing fancy. Undeterred, and eventually impossible to ignore, Wispy Bell goes to live as a human with a young boy and his mother and experiences everything she has desired. An offer from a famous filmmaker, however, reveals that Wispy Bell can enjoy the best of both of her worlds. While Wispy Bell achieves her wish to live as a human she also reaps fame and fortune (and satisfaction) from doing what she knows best — being a fairy. Craig Smith's illustrations, familiar and playful, capture each character's defining qualities — Wispy Bell's obstinacy and naivety, the consternation and resignation of the Fairy King and Queen, the curiosity and kindness of the young boy. The

story opens with an exchange between Wispy Bell and her mother about her desire to be human which sets the scene and tone. The following page drifts back into fairytale convention with the world *Once Upon A Time...* but goes on to quash any other sentimental feeling about being a fairy and living in a fairy land. While Wispy Bell dreams of the 'greener grass' and goes on to taste it, she also finds she enjoys the success of being a fairy too, even if it is only the make-believe world of the movies! Light-hearted and whimsical, this picture book will amuse lower and middle primary readers with its topsy-turvy view of the world.
Nola Allen

Luke's Way of Looking, Nadia Wheatley, ill. Matt Ottley, Hodder, 0 7336 0927 9 \$24.95 Hb

The medium is the message in this classic picture book about art, schooling, and life. Mr Barraclough (an old, repressive teacher in a gothic-style 1940s boys' school) allows his students only one way of representing things in art class — *his way*. Luke dares to be different and his fauve-style blue apple, cubist portrait, and expressionist view from the classroom window are angrily

view from the classroom window are angrily rejected. In the lunch-break, Luke visits the art gallery where he feels truly at home amongst modern paintings, sculpture, installations and performance works. Inspired, he sees the world even more differently and Mr Barraclough is reduced to silence by Luke's work in the afternoon art class. Mr Barraclough, the meek pupils and school setting are depicted using lines and cross-hatching in sepia tones, touched with pale rust to ochre colour wash here and there. Shadows emphasise the demonic dominance of the teacher. Only Luke's paintings are in other colours, emphasising his different way of looking at things. Golden light floods the doorway to the gallery and trickles down the steps to draw Luke inside, where he joyfully enters into the spirit of all the works he sees. Ottley exemplifies a range of modern art styles from Matisse to Jackson Pollock in the pictures which give Luke, and potentially the reader, a soaring sense of happiness. As he returns to school, the sepia world has changed to full colour, rich in the forms and imaginative motifs which the experience of art has made him intensely aware of. The golden light of Luke's confidence and inspiration floods the afternoon classroom, where only the teacher is colourless and defined by lines as he holds the subject for the art class, a watermelon. The next double-page spread is a wonderful expressionistic painting, in which Luke physically enters the watermelon, perceiving it with all his senses overlaid by additional insights from Jackson Pollock's paintings. On the last page, the teacher has shrunk to normal proportions and is painted as a puzzled, even wondering, old man as he recognises Luke's imaginative and artistic power. **Luke's Way of Looking** illuminates the importance of recognising children's special talents; shows that it is possible for even a limited teacher to recognise

exceptional talent; validates the individual's world view; and exemplifies the ways in which art clarifies and makes more powerfully immediate a set of forms that... can send us, altered, back into the street to awaken and redefine our feelings for the particular worlds of possibilities we move through¹.

Nadia Wheatley and Matt Ottley offer children and their teachers aesthetic pleasure and insight into important aspects of life in **Luke's Way of Looking**. Recommended for public and primary school libraries.

1. Varnedoe, Kirk. **A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern** London: Thames & Hudson, 1990. P.98.

Lyn Linning

Once Upon a Place, Robert Ingpen, Lothian, 0 85091 909 6 \$24.95 Hb



It is difficult to discern the intended audience for this collection of *paintings, drawings and notes on imaginary places*...

Those paths and places where stories crisscross in the forest of our imaginative literature... The book contains two short sections with brief retellings of and drawings for **The Lost World** and **The Pied Piper of Hamelin**, neither of which does justice to the excitement and suspense of the original texts; **the Owl and the Pussy-Cat** is provided with four rather static paintings; the title page has sketches for **Alice** (with a very sweet little girl but marvellous animals); and there are two longer sections, **The Tabard Inn** and **The Banquet Hall on Tara Hill**.

The Tabard Inn is the meeting place for Chaucer's pilgrims, and Ingpen has produced a series of wonderful portraits that reflect and complement the acuity of Chaucer's text: each is accompanied by appropriate lines from the **Prologue** (in modern English). The portraits are highly evocative and demonstrate



Ingpen's ability to empathise with imaginative literature. A full-text illustrated **Prologue** would be wonderful.

What do John Lennon, Robin Hood, Mary Bryant, Paul Bunyan, Heracles, Merlin and Bilqis have in common? I don't know, but they appear in one of the seven **Last Supper** type paintings which largely make up the Tara Hall section of the book. Although the figures are briefly identified, their selection is a mystery, the only clue is that these are *Banquets of Heroes*, which leaves readers none the wiser. One of the oddest heroes is Clancy (of the Overflow) who appears in the same panel as St Joan, among others! No doubt there are reasons for the groupings, but it would have been helpful to inform readers of them; as it is the choices seem merely eccentric.

As a book (i.e. considered as a whole), this is a most unsatisfactory collection of ill-assorted parts; only the wonderful Chaucerian portraits seem to have a clear sense of purpose and to invite further study.

Jo Goodman

The Three Sillies, Steven Kellogg, Walker, 0 7445 4044 5 \$24.95 Hb

Kellogg's distinctive illustrations dominate this retelling of the old English folktale. In his version Kellogg tells of the daughter on the verge of marriage who goes into the beer cellar and sees a mallet hanging precariously from the ceiling. Rather than do anything about it she starts weeping at the thought that after she is married and has a child, that child will one day be in the cellar when the mallet falls. Her mother and father follow her line of thought. The suitor, amazed at such silliness, calls off the marriage unless he can find three other people in the world sillier than these three. Amazingly he does!

Vigorous drawings with speech balloons scattered copiously over each page for an added dimension will have readers glued to the pages as the sheer silliness of the story unfolds before them. It's a real nonsense story, which comes to a logical and satisfyingly silly ending.

Margaret Phillips.

Appendix C. USB

[Contains photo of author, electronic copies of books, and an electronic copy of the dossier.]