

Focus IBBY issue 58.4, 2020

by LIZ PAGE

IBBY General Assembly 2020

2020 has been a difficult year worldwide. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the 37th IBBY Congress that was due to be held in Moscow, Russia, in September 2020 had to be postponed until September 2021. Thus, IBBY had to decide how to undertake its biennial General Assembly. This membership meeting could not be postponed for a year because of the legal obligations that are fixed in the IBBY statutes:

Clause III: Governing Bodies

There shall be two governing bodies for the management of the affairs of the International Board on Books for Young People: the General Assembly and the Executive Committee which, together with the President, acts on behalf of the General Assembly between its meetings and reports to the General Assembly.

I. General Assembly. A meeting of the members shall be held at least every other year and at a time and place to be determined by the Executive Committee.

I.1 Regular Meetings

A meeting of the members shall be held at least every other year and at a time and place to be determined by the Executive Committee. The purposes of such meetings shall be to:

- I.1.1 Verify the legality of the meeting and accept the agenda; no decisions may be taken on any matter not on the agenda as accepted, except to call for a Special Meeting, as provided in Clause III, Section I.2
- I.1.2 Approve the report of the activities of the International Board on Books for Young People since the last regular meeting
- I.1.3 Review the Treasurer's report on the financial status of the International Board on Books for Young People for the two complete calendar years prior to the year of the regular meeting
- I.1.4 Review the Auditors' report for the two complete calendar years prior to the year of the regular meeting
- I.1.5 Approve, or register disapproval of, the management of the funds of the International Board on Books for Young People for the two complete calendar years prior to the year of the regular meeting
- I.1.6 Discharge the Treasurer, Executive Director and the Executive Committee
- I.1.7 Receive information about and comment freely upon any current and projected activities of the International Board on Books for Young People, as presented by the Executive Committee
- I.1.8 Suggest guidelines to the Executive Committee as to the appropriate dues to be assessed under Clause II, Section 6
- I.1.9 Vote on amendments to the Statutes of the International Board on Books for Young People

1.1.10 Elect

- The President of the International Board on Books for Young People
- The members of the Executive Committee
- The President of the Hans Christian Andersen Jury
- The Auditors

1.1.11 Consider any other business brought before the regular meeting by any member.

With all this to achieve even without a congress, an IBBY General Assembly had to be called in 2020. After discussion and a date selected by the Executive Committee (EC), Saturday, September 12, 2020, was chosen. After that, the procedure went ahead as usual, although with some necessary major changes. The meeting was held virtually using an online video conference software.

Because of the problems of voting at the virtual meeting, an online voting platform was set and the National Section delegates had a week to vote using the platform. The matters to be voted on were sent to the members in advance, including the candidates for the EC 2020-22. Each candidate was asked to submit a three-minute film to introduce themselves and to say why they should be elected—very much as the in-person elections are held. Although we all prefer to meet in person, the virtual presentations worked very well, allowing the members to take time to make their selections.

Because no traveling or long trip away from home was involved, the virtual meeting allowed more sections to be represented. Although members from some sections could not join the online meeting because of technical difficulties, seventy-one national sections were able to vote. Around 120 members joined the virtual meeting from nineteen different time zones! It was a wonderful sight to see so many friends from around the world, even if it was as small images on the screen.

The meeting was declared legal and IBBY President Mingzhou Zhang gave the welcome and opening speech. He thanked all the members for their work, especially in the current circumstances.

Coronavirus has changed the world, but our affection and responsibility for children remain unchanged: under the black cloud of the pandemic, IBBY national sections and IBBY international have tried our very best to carry out planned programmes and promote reading among children in various creative ways. Congratulations to you all, in IBBY we have an amazing international network of people who are committed to bringing children and books together and to promote international understanding through quality children's books!

...And if the IBBY founder, Jella Lepman were still alive, she would also be very happy with our gathering today, and for your continued solidarity to continue to work for the ideals she gave us so many years ago.

The agenda followed the usual pattern for an IBBY General Assembly, even though the voting had already been accomplished online. The IBBY

Biennial Report 2018-20, the IBBY Financial Statement 2018 and 2019, and the Auditor’s Report were all accepted. Two changes were proposed to the current IBBY Statutes: (1) the official inclusion of the Chair of the IBBY Trust as an *ex officio* member of the Executive Committee without a vote, and (2) striking from the statutes the requirement that the President of IBBY is an *ex officio* member of the HCA Jury. Both of these proposals were accepted by the voting members, and the IBBY statutes will be updated. The members also voted on the 2020-22 EC. Mingzhou Zhang (China) was reelected as IBBY president for his second term of office, and Junko Yokota (USA) was reelected for a second term as Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury president. The following members of the EC were elected from sixteen candidates: Denis Beznosov (Russia), Doris Breitmoser (Germany), Sophie Hallam (UK), Basarat Midhat Kazim (Pakistan), Redza Khairuddin (Malaysia), Shereen Kreidieh (Lebanon), Constanza Mekis (Chile), Akoss Ofori-Mensah (Ghana), Elena Pasoli (Italy), and Sylvia Vardell (USA). Congratulations to all! From these ten members, Sophie Hallam and Basarat Midhat Kazim were chosen as vice presidents by the committee for the term 2020-22.

The *ex officio* members of the EC were reconfirmed: Executive Director Liz Page (Switzerland), Treasurer Ellis Vance (USA), and newly appointed Chair of the IBBY Trust Patsy Aldana (Canada). *Bookbird* editors Janelle Mathis and Petros Panaou were also reconfirmed.



Legend: l-r, top row IBBY President Mingzhou Zhang, HCAA Jury President Junko Yokota, EC members: Denis Beznosov, Doris Breitmoser, Sophie Hallam, Basarat Midhat Kazim, Redza Khairuddin; 2nd row Shereen Kreidieh, Constanza Mekis, Akoss Ofori-Mensah, Elena Pasoli, Sylvia Vardell; 3rd row *ex officio* members: Liz Page, Ellis Vance, Patsy Aldana; *Bookbird* Editors: Janelle Mathis and Petros Panaou.

The 2020 General Assembly also included news about the IBBY activities. Visit the IBBY website (www.ibby.org) to catch up on all the news.

IBBY President Mingzhou Zhang closed the meeting by saying:

In the next two years, unusually, we will have two IBBY World Congresses: in Moscow, Russia 2021 and in Putrajaya, Malaysia in 2022. This will be a challenge not only for the sections who are organizing these events, but for all of us. I would like to warmly thank both organizing committees, in Russia and in Malaysia, for their commitment and determination to bring you these wonderful events. The Russian Programme Committee has launched a series of online projects that will maintain interest and attract more attention and a wider audience.

Thank you all for taking the time to “zoom” into this meeting. We know that it has been difficult with the vast time differences; it has been a challenge for everyone, but it is heartening to see so many. Like all of you, I sincerely hope that we shall meet once again in-person next year. We are planning a special event for the sections in Moscow instead of the General Assembly; the next General Assembly will be held in Putrajaya, Malaysia in 2022.

News from the IBBY Secretariat

On November 1, Nina Garde took up her position as IBBY Administration and Communications Manager. Nina was born and raised in the south of France. She studied art history at the Ecole du Louvre in Paris and at the University of Heidelberg. After that, she worked as a project assistant, and later as a product manager, at the Frankfurt Book Fair from 2017 to 2020, where she was in charge of international projects and the Kids and New Generation activities of the fair. IBBY has increased the part-time position from 60% to a 100% position to include a larger social media presence.



Participating in the Jury of the Andersen 2020 Award

by Viviane Ezratty, member of the Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury 2020

The “Little Nobel Prize in Literature” 2020, as the Andersen Prize is often called, was awarded on Tuesday, May 4, 2020, to the American author Jacqueline Woodson and the Swiss illustrator Albertine. One of the jury members looks back on the collective work that led to this selection and opens the door a little to the debating room for us.

Here is another well-thought-out schedule that was shaken up last spring: in January 2020, the jury for the award met and deliberated for a week, and then the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) released the names of twelve finalists. Traditionally, the announcement of the final winners is made during at the Bologna International Children's Book Fair. However, in 2020 the fair was postponed and then canceled. Thus, IBBY made its announcement at a virtual press conference, and in 2021 a worthy tribute will be paid to the winners and nominees. Viviane

Ezratty gives us the stages and the aims of this selection.

AN HONOR

It is both an honor and a big responsibility to have been appointed as a juror for the Andersen Award, which has been awarded every two years by IBBY since 1956 to an author and since 1966 to an illustrator for his or her contribution to children's literature.

The aim of this honorary award is to stimulate and promote literary and artistic creation, and to encourage the translation and circulation of outstanding books by rewarding a living author or illustrator "for the exceptional quality of his or her body of work."

In 2020, thirty-nine IBBY national sections nominated thirty-four authors and thirty-six illustrators. Ten jurors from different professional and geographical backgrounds, under the chairmanship of Junko Yokota, were appointed by IBBY.

It was an exciting and stimulating experience, but also months of intensive work to get through the reading and analysis of seventy dossiers (30 to 160 pages each) and the five books proposed for each candidate. It was really exciting to plunge into very different worlds, to get immersed in such different styles and cultural contexts—as much as possible without any prejudices—as well as to ask oneself the question of the selection criteria to be adopted.

IN PRACTICE

In April 2019, each juror received a USB key containing the dossiers and books in their original language with at least summaries or chapters translated into English or other languages, as well as an Excel table for each candidate with a list of his or her books submitted, their titles in the original language and in English, if translated. The most difficult thing was to get organized, given this mass of information. I first checked if the books existed in French to get them from the library or to study them at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (National Library of France), in particular the picturebooks collected by IBBY France.

I started with the countries I knew nothing about (Azerbaijan, Jordan), so as to finish with the authors and illustrators I knew better—logically, the nominees of the French section of IBBY: Marie-Aude Murail and François Roca. I filled in my Excel sheet gradually as I read the books, with notes on the subject of the book and especially on the style or techniques used, and a color code that reflected my appreciation of these books. At the same time, in a large notebook, organized by country—one page per author and one per illustrator—I summarized the information from the dossiers: the author's life, age, education, interests, and also what characterizes him or her.

I finished this work of discovering the dossiers and books around October, right in time to make a summary in November and December. This allowed me to "digest" the mass of data and, *in fine*, to form my opinion. This led me to work on four or five nominees each week.

An internal discussion blog had been set up where each juror was invit-

ed to post, in English, his or her comments on the selection criteria for the titles or on the authors and illustrators. Although only a few jurors participated, their comments helped me a lot, giving me an idea of what they thought... I must confess that for my part, I only made rather general remarks and mostly asked questions, finding it too difficult to express in English more specific analyses.

At the end of November, each juror sent in a list of his or her top ten choices in each of the two categories, which allowed everyone's preferences to emerge, even if at this stage no one was eliminated.

DISCUSSIONS AND DEBATES

The jury meeting took place for one week in January 2020 at the International Youth Library (IYL) in Munich. The library was established by Jella Lepman in 1952, followed quickly by the founding of IBBY. The library is now housed in the beautiful fifteenth-century castle, Schloss Blumenburg, ten kilometers from the historic center.

IBBY took the excellent initiative to plan a first day of making contact, taking the group to visit Munich and enjoy a guided tour of the Haus der Kunst built by Hitler, a monumental art museum with contemporary exhibitions. The weight of history cannot be forgotten: in front of the castle, a memorial to those who perished in the death march from the Dachau camp near Munich was built. It is a reminder that Jella Lepman founded the IYL and IBBY to promote peace and "reeducate" the children in the aftermath of the Second World War by creating a traveling exhibition of the best children's books from around the world; this exhibition was held at the Haus der Kunst and is the origin of the IYL collection. The question of the "values" of openness to the world remains very much present in IBBY, and these values came up during the jury's discussions.

This day trip was an opportunity to get to know the other jurors better and, by visiting exhibitions, to get to know each other's way of approaching the collective and to discover each other's cultural and personal awareness. Throughout the week, we enjoyed listening and learning from each other. On the second day, we visited the IYL, including the small Michael Ende museum, the room dedicated to Erich Kästner, another dedicated to James Krüss, a beautiful exhibition of letters and envelopes illustrated by Binette Schroeder, and a soon-to-be-traveling exhibition of books in Arabic.

Then, to "warm up," we spent the afternoon looking at the actual copies of the books, in particular the books that can suffer from being read in PDF format. We exchanged views informally and cautiously, each of us gauging a little—such is the law of juries—about our impressions or questions.

JURORS AND CRITERIA

Things really started to get serious with the discussion of the selection



criteria, which can change from one jury to the next, depending on the personality of each and every member. All this in English—a foreign language for most of us.

The criteria chosen by the Jury 2020:

- Do not compromise on literary and aesthetic excellence.
- Do not keep works whose didactic intention harms these qualities, even if the “good” children’s book always has pedagogical virtues.
- Awaken children’s curiosity and stimulate their imagination: literature can be intentional, but not didactic, can offer clues for managing situations but without dictating what to do.
- Give children the essential message that they are not alone in the world.
- Empathy is a central notion.
- The relation to childhood must be genuine.
- Expressing diversity is an important notion: How does it impact the reader’s own cultural experience? The culture of the other should not seem artificial.
- Does the author or illustrator portray the world from his or her own cultural perspective?
- Look for the qualities of freshness and innovation, especially the more perennial ones.
- The author’s or illustrator’s complete body of work is taken into account.
- What does this or that book as a medium bring to a child in today’s society?

“The book you create must be indispensable, otherwise it’s of no interest. So why is the story valuable? Does it transport us elsewhere?”

Gro Dahle, Norwegian author

Wednesday and Thursday were dedicated to voting. Each juror presented the works of one of the nominees, in ascending order of votes already collected in November. I had previously been surprised to see that some authors and illustrators who I thought were very interesting had received few or no votes—sometimes not even from the jurors of their own country. The open discussion gave me a better understanding of the reticence.

When discussing the authors, there was soon a consensus on the twenty names to be eliminated in the first round of discussions—they were certainly interesting, but they did not meet the criteria defined. But for the illustrators, the discussion was much longer. Why this difference? Were there more illustrators than authors known by us all? Is an analysis of images more complicated to make objectively than an analysis of texts?

For the illustrators, therefore, making a decision proved to be more complex. We reconsidered earlier choices—both for and against—and finally selected some nominees who had initially had very few votes. This was either because the quality of the work required looking at the “real” books and not PDFs, or because some criteria deserved more thought.

The question of literary or artistic genre was also a big challenge: How can poets and novelists be compared? What status should be reserved for illustrators specializing in nonfiction? The discussion on the interest of the works submitted in relation to the whole body of work came up repeatedly. It is difficult to be more precise because there is an obligation not to reveal the content of the deliberations.

A few questions were debated at length:

- What do you do when an author has produced a masterpiece, but the rest of his or her work is very unequal?
- Should we keep an artist who made a great contribution at one time, but who has not tried anything new since?
- What about cultural appropriation? Nowadays, it seems difficult to credit a white creator who takes over the tales or stories of cultures other than his or her own. The position of the jurors seemed quite unequivocal, far from the more subtle vision defended by Marie-Aude Murail or Zadie Smith.
- How to address the question of stereotypes?
- How to combine literary and artistic quality with proximity to childhood?

Depending on their country or culture of origin, the jurors did not have the same sensitivity, and in the unsaid, the weight of geopolitics did play a role. Even if a juror was not there to represent his or her country, the light he or she could shed on the context, the author, and so on could still influence debates on the margins.

If the first criterion remained artistic and literary quality, was it necessary to ensure that the shortlist was representative of the different continents, even though western and northern Europe and the Anglo-Saxons were overrepresented?

It seemed fairer to select a short list of six rather than five nominees, since the jury had the freedom to set the number.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

The suspense lasted right up to the end, and the open vote created some surprises. Major and internationally known authors or illustrators were eliminated from the shortlist, while more unknown candidates were selected.

The final task was to draw up a list of books recommended for translation in order to bring back to the forefront some outstanding works whose authors or illustrators were not among the finalists.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, it will be 2021 before the winners and nominees will be honored at the 37th IBBY Congress in Moscow, which had to be postponed. The Hans Christian Andersen Award is one of the most important international awards for children's literature and should be further promoted.

Viviane Ezratty

This article first appeared in *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, #314, September 2020 (translated by Franca Salerno, IBBY Secretariat).

Since 2011, Viviane has been the director of the Parisian public library Françoise Sagan, which now includes the l'Heure Joyeuse historical children's book section, with French and foreign books from the sixteenth century onward. She has written regular book reviews for the *Revue des livres pour enfant* and several publications abroad and has been a member of the jury for several children's book prizes in France. Viviane worked with Libraries without Borders in 2011 on children's books for Haiti and in 2015 and 2016 on the project "ideas boxes." She has been a member of IBBY France for thirty years.

Those interested in the international dimension of children's books should not hesitate to participate in the work of IBBY France, hosted by the National Center for Children's Literature at BnF: cnlj.bnf.fr/fr/ibby_france.

Sybil Wettasinghe (October 31, 1927 – July 1, 2020)

Sybil Wettasinghe was Sri Lanka's equivalent to Beatrix Potter. Beginning with her first illustration commission at fifteen, her work as an author and illustrator spanned more than seven decades. The result was over two hundred storybooks, many of them still in print.

While her stories are quintessentially Sri Lankan, her illustration style is remarkable and unique due to its sheer simplicity. Her human and animal characters, drawn with bold, curvaceous lines, appeal to young readers everywhere. Consequently, authors and publishers alike sought Sybil's services as an illustrator.

Sybil was a trailblazer in several ways. She introduced Sri Lankan children's literature to the world, while winning many international accolades. In 1965, her book *Vesak Lantern* won an Isabel Hutton Prize for Asian Women Writers for Children. The *Umbrella Thief*, her first book, initially published in 1959, won the Best Children's Picture Book award presented by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Japan in 1986. Popular to this day, the book is still in print and has been translated into seven languages. Her awards and achievements are too numerous to mention here, but her last one merits attention. On March 6, 2020, the Guinness Book of World Records recognized Sybil Wettasinghe as the creator of the storybook with the highest number of alternate endings. Out of 20,000 endings submitted by children from all over Sri Lanka, the best 1,200 entries were published in print format, together with the story titled *Wonder Crystal*.

It was also Sybil who introduced Sri Lanka to IBBY circa 1983.

Consequently, she widened the horizons of Sri Lankan authors and illustrators, notably leading to one illustrator winning an international award.

Sybil Wettasinghe was a Sri Lankan cultural icon in every sense of the word. Although her presence will be missed, her work will continue to delight and inspire generations to come.



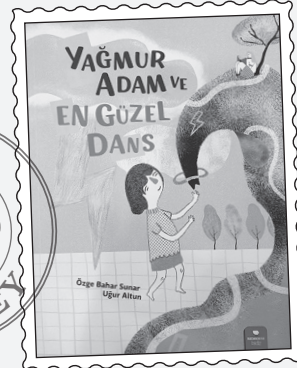
Photo: Credit:
The Sunday Times, Sri Lanka

Liz Page was born in Britain and moved with her family to Heidelberg, Germany, in 1983. After nearly two years they left Germany and settled in Basel, Switzerland. Through her interest in children and books, Liz helped to establish the Intercultural Children's Library in Basel—JUKIBU, which opened in 1990. She was a member of the managing board with responsibility for the day-to-day running of the library for the first years and was elected President of the Intercultural Children's Libraries Association of Switzerland, now called INTERBIBLIO. She joined IBBY as Assistant to the Executive Director in 1997 and in 2009 was appointed Executive Director.



This story about the importance of rain is told from the perspective of a deaf girl. After a sunny day, Rain Man covers the city as people run away and complain about the weather. He decides not to rain again. Drought is big problem for everyone, but especially for a deaf girl who can only dance with her bare feet feeling the rhythm of the raindrops. This poetic narrative ends with how people and children may enjoy and benefit from the rain. The author presents empathy not only with a deaf girl but also with Rain Man. Abstraction, patterns, shape manipulation, and color contrasts are used to catch visual attention by the illustrator.

Büşra İzgi



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