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Editorial

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Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature, Volume 56, Number 1, 2018, pp. 2-3 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2018.0000>



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WITH THE FOUNDATION OF IBBY, the International Youth Library, and *Bookbird*, Jella Lepman concretized the idea put forth by French critic Paul Hazard that children's literature can portray both what makes every culture unique and what is universal: our "humanity." In consequence, by reading books in other languages and from culture rather than our own, we can gain an understanding of other cultures, as well as realize our common humanity, and this can bring us closer to each other. Ultimately, reading is a peace project—hence IBBY's stated mission "to promote international understanding through children's books" (mission statement, IBBY homepage).

As editor of *Bookbird*, I naturally see it as my ambition to promote a better understanding of children's literature. With the global reach of *Bookbird*, I also recognize that we are excellently placed to promote not just understanding but *international* understanding of and through children's literature. We attempt this with every issue in our choice of articles, reviews, exhibitions, and interviews. However, sometimes a topic or theme comes up that particularly well "promotes international understanding through children's books." The special feature of this issue, "translation and transmedia," is ideal for this purpose. Translation is fundamental to IBBY's mission. Without books in translation, we are locked in our own language ghettos. This is true even of large languages, like English, where the percentage of translated books is often very low. Transmedia is another rewriting process by which works of literature are adapted to new purposes, media forms,

and genres. Through such adaptation work, books are given new lease of life and can continue to "promote understanding" of different times, cultures, and languages.

The process of "translation" can be rather intricate and take unexpected turns. The cover of this issue of *Bookbird* is a case in point. The image is from Svjetlan Junakovic's *Great Book of Animal Portraits* (2007) and represents a murdered chicken in a bathtub. One can regard it as a translation or reinterpretation of Jacques-Louis David's 1793 painting *The Death of Marat*, which depicts the murder of Jean-Paul Marat by Charlotte Corday the same year. It is one of the most famous images of and from the French Revolution and has been compared to Michelangelo's *Pietà* and Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ*. It has inspired later painters—like Edvard Munch and Pablo Picasso, who made their own versions of *The Death of Marat*—and is also frequently alluded to in popular culture (film, PC games, etc.). What Junakovic does with his version could be seen as mere subversion, but I think it cuts deeper than parody. On the one hand, Junakovic's can be seen as an anthropomorphic dead chicken, that is, an animal (bird) cast as a human being. Since anthropomorphism is heavily featured in children's literature and culture—from Aesop to Zootropolis—the painting (and the whole collection of animal portraits) thus invites a children's literature reading. In other words, Junakovic's act of translation questions the child-adult boundary by humorously repackaging serious art as children's literature. On the other hand, the original painting, *The Death of*

Marat, is so well-known, looms so large, and its style of painting has been so meticulously copied that it is still in a sense visible through Junakovic's "translation." If so, one could argue that Marat is still there, but turned chicken—through a process of zoomorphism (turning men into beasts), which is the opposite of anthropomorphism. However, with Junakovic's painting it is impossible to say if the animal has turned man or the man turned animal. Thus, Junakovic subtly calls the human-animal divide into question, something that is very much part of a contemporary discourse on posthumanism, animal rights, and the like.

And that is just the cover!

For a more extensive commentary on the theme, I refer you to Anna Kerchy, who presents the featured articles, in her critical introduction to the study of translation and transmedia.

Finally, having prepared this issue, and seen the potential in the material, I have come to recognize how well it fits the mission of IBBY. With this in mind, I want to propose to *Bookbird's* readers and to IBBY that an award for the translation of children's books should be established. It would, alongside the H. C. Andersen Award, be a prize that fully encapsulates the spirit of IBBY—a translation prize to promote international understanding through children's books.



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