

ISSN 2577-0527



WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 1

August 2015
Expansive

Worlds
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WOW Review: Volume VIII Issue 1
August 2015

Table of Contents

Introduction and Editor's Note	1
Book Review: The Bamboo Sword	2-3
Book Review: Echo	4-6
Book Review: Emu	7-8
Book Review: The Lion and the Bird	9-10
Book Review: Rain Reign	11-12
Book Review: Seven Second Delay	13-14
Book Review: There is a Crocodile Under My Bed!	15-16
Book Review: Vango: Between Sky and Earth	17-18

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WOW Review VIII, Issue 1

Introduction

Looking across the books for this issue of *WoW Reviews*, the theme that comes to mind is “expansive.” This issue highlights books that contain expansive plots and landscapes, as well as books that expand our thinking and engagement. Novels like *Vango between Earth and Sky*, *Echo*, *The Bamboo Sword*, and *Seven Second Delay* take readers on adventures that cross geographical, historical, or philosophical boundaries. *Reign Rain* invites us to think deeply about the struggles that some young people live with every day, yet, in spite of what many of us might consider limiting factors, move beyond with the power of their own convictions. If a grand adventure interests you, *Vango between Earth and Sky* fits that description. *Echo* takes readers through historical accounts with nothing less than a wonderfully magical ending, and *The Bamboo Sword* takes readers to ancient Japan. In contrast, *Seven Second Delay* launches readers into a dystopian future.

The picture books *Emu*, *The Lion and the Bird*, and *There’s a Crocodile under My Bed* contain expansive illustrations that take readers to the sprawling Australian Outback, the wide scope of the Canadian prairies, and the ever-surprising imagination of children. Readers will be intrigued with the information that male emus nurture the young, the hilarious antics of the crocodile Carl under young Sophie’s bed, and the quietly contemplative and deeply satisfying friendship between a lion and a bird.

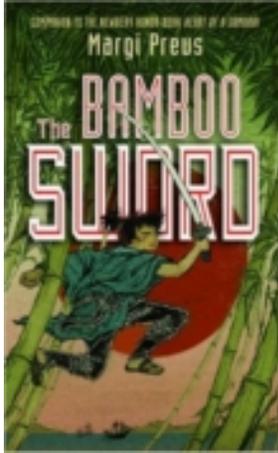
Our next theme is *Movement, Transition, and Change across Time*, with reviews due November 15, 2015.

Holly Johnson, Editor



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Book Review: The Bamboo Sword

Written by Margi Preus

Amulet Books, 2015, 352 pp.

ISBN: 1419708074

This historical fiction novel is based on a true story and focuses on a thirteen-year-old Japanese boy, Yoshi. It is set in the 1850s, a time when Japan was opening a door to the West, ending 250 years of cultural isolation. The book is a companion to *Heart of a Samurai* (Preus, 2010), a 2011 Newbery Medal Honor Book about the life of Manjiro, America's first Japanese resident in the 1840s.

Japan had traded extensively with European countries since the 1540s, but in 1641, Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa banned communication under *Sakoku*, the locked country policy, because he was afraid Christianity would weaken his authority. This isolation lasted for approximately 250 years, until Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States Navy sailed to Japan on Black Ships and demanded diplomatic relations.

Yoshi longs to become a samurai, an elite swordsman, but his dream does not come true due to his servant-class status. Although becoming a samurai is not achievable, Yoshi continues his sword practice with a bamboo stick he imagines is a sword. He believes that the sword is the only solution to everything.

The arrival of Americans in Japan is a turning point in Yoshi's life because he becomes an apprentice bodyguard for Manjiro, who is on his way to Edo (former name of Tokyo) as an ambassador of American trade for the emperor. He also encounters Jack, an American boy separated from his companions and the Black Ships, and builds a close relationship. Yoshi is also intrigued by American culture and the English language he learns from Manjiro and Jack. As he learns about America, he becomes caught between Japanese and American cultures and struggles to find his own place. He is also encouraged to look for solutions and perspectives beyond his sword, and becomes determined to "to see more, to know more" and even "to be more" (p. 236).

The story takes place in the 19th century and has an underlying theme of intercultural learning. Through dialogue between Yoshi and Jack, Yoshi and Manjiro, and the Japanese officers and Matthew Perry, readers encounter the challenges and difficulties faced by people engaged in intercultural communication. Readers are also given a glimpse into Japanese lifestyles, society, culture, traditions, and the relationship between Japan and the U.S. during that time.

The Bamboo Sword can be paired with books that address cultural identity and cross-cultural experience themes, including the author's own works, such as *Heart of a Samurai* (2010). *Manjiro: The Boy Who Risked His Life for Two Countries* (Emily McCully,

2013) is a picture-book biography about Manjiro's exploration of America and his life in Japan. This book shows readers his life journey. *Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun* (Rhoda Blumberg, 1985) is a 1986 Newbery Honor Book that gives readers the opportunity to see the international interactions during the 19th century from multiple perspectives, including both the Japanese and American perspectives.

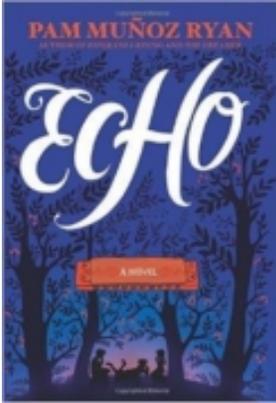
Margi Preus is an American writer who writes popular plays, picture books, and novels for young readers. She is also a children's literature instructor at the College of St. Scholastica and the University of Minnesota-Duluth. She has received numerous awards, including a 2015 ALA/ALSC Notable Book award for *West of the Moon* (2014) and a 2013 Notable Book for a Global Society award for *Shadow on the Mountain* (2012). She has traveled extensively, including Japan, and acknowledges experts in Japan along with other research sources. Her website has additional information and access to her books.

Junko Sakoi, University of Arizona



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Book Review: Echo

Written by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Scholastic, 2015, 592 pp.

ISBN: 9780439874021

Your fate is not yet sealed. Even in the darkest night, a star will shine, a bell will chime, a path will be revealed. (p.25)

Echo blends genres; framed by a tale of magic and mystery, with the bulk of the story told across three distinct settings of historical fiction. The uniting themes across each of the four sections include the power of music, the dangers of intolerance, and the powerful results of choosing compassion and courage over selfishness and fear. A (perhaps magical?) harmonica travels through each tale, from the fairy tale inspired prologue to the stories of Friedrich in Germany, Mike in Pennsylvania, and Ivy in California.

The book opens with the story of Otto, lost alone in a forest, who encounters three cursed sisters trapped by a witch's spell. The sisters save his life, guiding him from the clutches of the forest and entrusting him with two things—a special harmonica and the charge to someday save their lives.

Part I: Friedrich, a young musician and aspiring conductor, is socially shunned due to his awkwardness and the physical deformity of a large facial birthmark. In 1933, the Nazi party prizes their version of physical, intellectual, and racial perfection. Friedrich's father is pressured to report him to the Nazi party for his intellectual and physical conditions, but doing so would mean Friedrich would be sterilized (or worse). Friedrich's sister has joined the Nazi Youth movement and the family fears that she might report their political views. During this turmoil, Friedrich discovers a majestically crafted harmonica and finds a sense of inner peace and courage while playing it that he will desperately need when his father is imprisoned in a work camp. Can Friedrich find the resources and daring to rescue his father?

Part II: The same harmonica surfaces two years later in rural Pennsylvania, in the hands of orphans Mike and Frankie. Mike is a gifted piano player and all-around musician who dreams of a better life for himself and his younger brother. Living in an abusive boys' home, their hope to be adopted seems to be slipping away as they grow older. When a man shows up at the orphanage looking for boys with musical talent, the two are saved from the orphanage and their luck seems to have changed. However, their new guardian seems anything but excited about adopting two boys, in fact she avoids them at all costs. Can Mike figure out a way to save Frankie from returning to the orphanage? Could his musical talent save him as well? A harmonica contest might be the answer to his problems.

Part III: When Ivy must start a new school, one of her only comforts is the hope of an excellent music program. She misses her old school and even more, she misses her older brother Fernando who is away fighting in World War II. Her talent with the harmonica makes her hopeful she might someday play the flute and she writes long letters to Fernando about her hopes and dreams. But in 1944 in Southern California, Ivy cannot attend the neighborhood Lincoln School as it is for white children only. Instead, she must go to a school for Mexican children, even though she speaks English fluently. She soon discovers that prejudice and fear are problems throughout the area; neighbors of Japanese descent have been removed from their homes and sent to internment camps. How can Ivy pursue her dreams when the laws and schools seem against her and against anyone who is seen as an ‘other’?

The stories of Otto, Friedrich, Mike, and Ivy eventually intertwine and collide. Is it just happenstance? Will the power of music and an enchanted harmonica save each of them from their struggles? The reader must decide how much of the story’s resolution is due to destiny, fate, and magic and how much can be credited to the compassion, strength, and natural talents of each of the main protagonists.

What is certain is that Pam Muñoz Ryan has crafted a powerfully interwoven story of friendship, perseverance, and bravery. Although the finely drawn and incredibly likeable characters are one of the most compelling features of this book, so is the beautiful language throughout with the words calling to be read aloud. Additionally, the themes encourage students and teachers to grapple with issues and events related to social justice and critical literacy, examining how both historical and current events position and penalize marginalized groups.

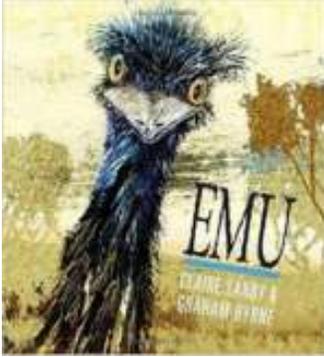
Echo is another powerfully written tale by the author of other gems of children’s literature such as *Esperanza Rising* (2000), *Riding Freedom* (1999), and *The Dreamer* (2010). Pam Muñoz Ryan was born and raised in Bakersfield, California and was a bilingual classroom teacher for many years; while pursuing her master’s degree in education a professor encouraged her to consider writing professionally. Her first children’s book, *One Hundred is a Family*, was published in 1994. She is the recipient of two Pura Belpré Awards, the Virginia Hamilton Award for Multicultural Literature, the Jane Addams Children’s Book Award, and the Schneider Family Book Award. Information on her work is found on her website.

Marie LeJeune, Western Oregon University



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Book Review: Emu

Written by Claire Saxby

Illustrated by Graham Byrne

Candlewick Press, 2015, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9780763674793

For in the emu's world, it is the male's job to raise the fledglings. (n.p).

The emu is a fascinating bird. Unable to fly like most birds, emus adapt to life on the ground. As tall as humans, these birds are fast and often outrun any predator that might be interested in fowl for dinner. And while the adult bird can outrun its predators, the young need help and thus adult males can be very protective.

This informational book describes an emu's world from the very beginning of their lives with their fathers to the time when they, too, are ready to mate and carry on the species. Part of the series Nature Storybooks, this wonderful picture book presents both narrative and factual information in two distinctive fonts on each two page spread. From the beckoning cover through the index, Emu is sure to engage readers aesthetically while educating them about the male emu, as the female emu leaves once her eggs are laid. The illustrator uses ink with a twig and sponges, and then digital collaging, so the book is both colorful and graphically stimulating.

Emu would make a terrific addition to a text set on birds, Australia, or gender roles across species. Other books that would pair nicely with Emu could include Elizabeth Thwing's (2014) *Amazing Amusing Emus: Yesterday's Dinosaurs on Today's Farm* and Marianne Berkes' (2011) *Over in Australia: Amazing Animals Down Under*. The illustrations could inspire young artists and their interest in technology.

Claire Saxby lives in Australia and has written numerous books for young people, including *There was an Old Sailor* (2014), winner of the Crystal Kite Award. More information about Saxby's life can be found here and on her website.

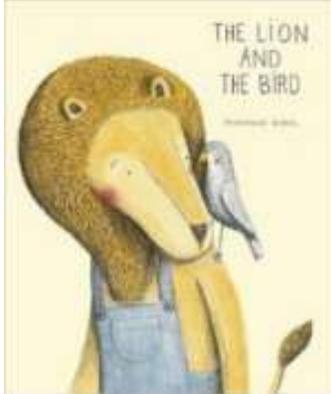
Graham Byrne is an artist who has also worked as an electrical engineer and builder. Born in Sydney, Australia, his first picture book, *Big Red Kangaroo* (2015), was also written by Claire Saxby. More information about can be found through his blog and on the Walker Books website. The blogspot would be of special interest to those interested in Byrne's illustrating processes at the Walker Books website.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volume-viii1/>



Book Review: *The Lion and the Bird*

Written and Illustrated by Marianne Dubuc

Enchanted Lion Books, 2014, 64 pp.

ISBN13: 9781592701513

But winter doesn't feel all that cold with a friend (p. 28)

It comes as no surprise that *The Lion and the Bird* recently landed itself on the Outstanding International Book award list for 2015. Marianne Dubuc carefully and gently tells the story of a lion and a bird who circumstantially become friends. The lion is busying himself with yardwork when he realizes the bird has a hurt wing. Lion's tender nature as he bandages the bird is the beginning of a sweet and kind friendship. The bird is unable to fly south for the winter and lion gladly welcomes the bird into his home. The lion makes a place for the bird in each part of his life and keeps the bird warm in winter both literally and figuratively. When spring comes and the other birds return, lion is filled with deep sadness as his friend must go. And he waits, and waits to see if his friend will return again in the winter.

Particularly striking is the way Dubuc's words and illustrations gracefully intertwine to tell the story. Many pages are wordless, yet they advance our understanding of the lion, the bird, their friendship, and particularly the passage of time. The way Dubuc shows the characters' emotions through the illustrations and the simplicity of the text is remarkable. While Dubuc and her work originate in Quebec, there are no particular markers of race, gender, or ethnicity in this text. However, the characters clearly exist in a geographical place that has four seasons and this contributes to the reader's understanding of the passage of time and the characters living in a more northern region.

The Lion and the Mouse could stand alone as an exemplar text particularly to mentor students in the pairing of text and illustrations and on depicting friendship, kindness, and building relationships. Students in first through fourth grade would enjoy this text, but deeper understandings and themes present in the text make it appropriate for older students as well. The book could be paired with Jerry Pinkney's beautifully illustrated *The Lion and the Mouse* (2009) for the gentle depiction of the lion as well as the meaning of kindness and friendship. *Owen & Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship* (Hatloff, 2006) is an informational text about two animals that create an unlikely bond and friendship. This true story demonstrates many of the same themes, such as friendship and kindness.

Marianne Dubuc is a trained graphic designer from the University of Quebec in Montreal. She has become an international author and illustrator, with books published in more than 13 countries. Her books include *The Sea* (2012), *The Bus Ride* (2015),

Animal Masquerade (2012), and *In Front of the House* (2010). In 2014, the Canada Council for the Arts awarded Dubuc a Governor General's Literacy Award and her book *In Front of My House* (2010) was a nominee for the German Youth Literature Award. More about Dubuc can be found on her website and on her blog.

Rebecca Gasiewicz, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio



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Book Review: Rain Reign

Written by Ann M. Martin

Feiwel and Friends (Macmillan), 2014, 226 pp.

ISBN 9780312643003

I wonder if my mother likes homonyms. I wonder if she likes prime numbers or rules or words. I wonder if she left because I like those things. (p. 62)

Rose Howard is in the fifth grade and has a list of particular likes that might not engage the average eleven-year-old. She loves words (mainly homonyms), rules, and numbers (especially prime numbers). Rose invites the reader into the “nonfiction” story of her real life, letting us know that she will be the main character of this, her own true life story. She also explains her need for ‘conversation starters’ when talking with others who might not be as fascinated by rules, homonyms, and prime numbers. We find out that Rose lives in upstate New York with her sporadically employed father, that she has a doting uncle named Uncle Weldon, and she has her very own ‘diagnosis’—high functioning autism, “which some people call Asperger’s syndrome” (p. 6). Her closest friend is her dog, Rain, who like Rose (Rows) also has a homonym filled name (Reign, Rein).

Rose often struggles at school to navigate social conversations, the difference between mistakes and breaking rules, and the failure of her bus driver to completely obey all traffic laws and appropriate procedures. Such troubles often land her in the hallway or principal’s office, and even get her kicked off the school bus. Her father is impatient with Rose’s school troubles and her home habits of rewriting her lists of homonyms and fixating on routine. Rain and her Uncle Weldon are two sources of comfort for Rose even when nothing else in her life feels quite right. Then, when a severe storm hits her town, Rose is suddenly left struggling with few coping mechanisms—Rain has gone missing and she and her father are isolated by raging flood waters.

During her quest to find her lost dog, Rose must conquer challenges at school, in the community, with her father, and ultimately within herself and the rules that guide her sense of right in the world. Searching for Rain helps Rose connect with classmates, community, and her own inner strength and resources; in fact, it seems to transform most aspects of her life, except for her tumultuous and tense relationship with her single father. When Rain is ultimately found, Rose must confront the dilemma of what to do when she finds out that perhaps Rain wasn’t a true ‘gift’ from her father, but actually another family’s lost pet. How can Rose let go of her truest friend? How can she not follow her own inner rules of what is right and return the dog to its original owners? And most importantly, how can Rose live with her father’s anger over her decision?

Readers connect deeply to Martin’s characterization of Rose in this powerful and poignant story. Although Rose is at first defined by her difference from peers, ultimately the book’s themes remind us that at heart, Rose is a young girl who wants and needs what all children do—connection, compassion, safety, and belonging. In an era where many books about children on the autism spectrum are written, *Rain Reign* stands out in its excellent portrayal of both the importance of differences and the universality of love. The book won the 2015 Schneider Family Book Award for the artistic expression of the disability experience for middle grade readers. It was also the recipient of the inaugural Charlotte Huck Award from NCTE, designed to honor fiction that has the potential to transform children’s lives by inviting compassion, imagination, and wonder.

The title would make an excellent whole-class read aloud, literature circle choice, or recommended book for independent reading. It would be an excellent book for a beginning of the year read aloud to promote classroom discussions around the ways in which we learn, the importance of care and compassion, and the inclusion of multiple ways of being in the world into classroom communities.

Ann M. Martin is well known as the original writer and creator of the *Babysitter’s Club* series. She lives in upstate New York where she works full time at her writing. She has written many titles for children, including middle grade novels like *Rain Reign*, and she is the recipient of a 2003 Newbery Honor Award for *A Corner of the Universe*. She is the founder of the nonprofit group, Lisa Libraries, which donates books to children in under-served areas. Although she does not maintain an author website online, she does social network on Facebook and Twitter.

Marie Lejeune, Western Oregon University



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Book Review: *Se7en Second Delay*

Written by Tom Easton

Holiday House, 220 pp.

ISBN: 9780823432097

Another box opened on the other side of Mila's IDS. A header at the top read WATCHERS: 0. It quickly changed to WATCHERS: 1 and a message popped into the box. Adam: UR now being Watched (p.34)

Mila, seventeen-years-old and not a citizen of the Utopian Isles, finds herself detained at one of its Centers when she tries to enter illegally by crossing over the top of the entrance bridge. Her traveling companion Julian fell to his death, alerting authorities of their presence. After interviewing her, Center personnel decide to give Mila a limited phone implant so she can communicate and work in the Isles to prove she is able to live peacefully with the citizens. Once the implant is imbedded, Mila has a screen within her vision that allows her to communicate, but also allows others to view what she sees. Given a "seven second delay," Mila's implant allows her to block what she is currently viewing or doing so as to delete any embarrassing situations from her viewing feed. As she is getting ready to leave the Center, however, she is scanned and the Center medics find a small device in her head that they identify as a bomb. Deciding she is not harmless, Center personnel know what they have to do, and so does Mila. She has to escape.

Filled with intensity and edge-of-your-seat action, *Se7en Second Delay* is a fast-paced science fiction thriller with a teen protagonist who is not only smart, but resourceful. Mila knows she only has the seven second delay to think through situations with the Center that could easily end her life. And as she tries to stay alive, she is also trying to convince not only the Center personnel, but the Utopian public who are now attached to the feed, that she is not a terrorist. While mainly a science fiction narrative, this book also contains a burgeoning romance that will attract readers across multiple genres.

This science fiction narrative would make a great companion to M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2012), Tom Hoyle's *Thirteen* (2015), and Patrick Ness' *Chaos Walking* series as well as the *Lorien Legacies* series by Pittacus Lore. All are science fiction thrillers that keep teens anxiously reading for what would come next. Additionally, *Se7en Second Delay* complements text sets that address dystopian realities, fighting for survival, or attempting to change the world. This story has the potential to engage readers in discussion about how their current realities compare to futuristic stories about survival, being misunderstood, and the effort it takes to change thinking that allows others to suffer at the expense of the privileged. The book leaves the readers with an opening for a sequel as Mila and Alex continue to wrestle with their

plight and the exclusivity of the Utopian Isles. Somewhat similar to *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2010) in respect to the ability for others to watch participants as they face danger, *Seven Second Delay* is a great next read for dystopian and science fiction fans.

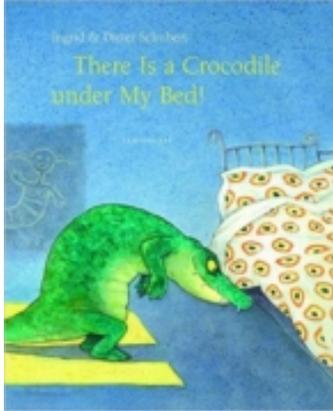
Tom Easton lives in England where he works in the publishing industry and has written numerous books for children and teens. *Seven Second Delay* is now shortlisted for the Portsmouth and Lancashire Book Awards. Writing under both Tom Easton (for science fiction/thrillers) and TS Easton (for his humorous books), he is the author of *Hav3n* (2013), *An English Boy in New York* (2014), and *Boys Don't Knit* (2014), all of which have been honored in the United Kingdom. More information about Easton and his work can be found on his website.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volume-viii1/>



Book Review: *There is a Crocodile Under My Bed!*
Written and Illustrated by Ingrid and Dieter Schubert
Lemniscatt, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2014/2015, np
ISBN:9781935954088

The story begins on the book cover as Carl, a wide-eyed crocodile, peers at a bed with the apparent intent of crawling beneath it. We learn a bit more about this creature from the end pages where four other animals with various bumps on their heads peer angrily at him as he walks away with a mask over his eyes and a sling shot in hand. By the time we read the first page of the story, we are already focused on the crocodile under the bed, although we aren't alone. Sophie, a little girl carrying a stuffed toy that could easily have come from Sendak's *Wild Things*, notices Carl right away. She proclaims that there is a crocodile under her bed and she isn't scared at all. Carl, however, is frightened and attempts to hide. So begins a delightful story in brilliantly constructed images of a little girl taming, training, and making friends with a very subservient and likeable crocodile. Sophie is demanding but Carl joins in her play as they jump through hoops, make pancakes and create cardboard crocodiles with empty egg cartons. She eventually insists that Carl take a bath before sharing his adventure stories. Carl quietly leaves when she falls asleep to return to his awaiting playmates pictured on the final end pages of the book. Very simple narration provides an outline for the story; however, rich illustrations reveal the imagination and delightful play reflective of the experiences of many children around the global community.

Ingrid and Dieter Schubert, an award winning husband and wife team of artists, are well known in their homeland of Holland as well as in the 21 other countries where they are published. They are originally from Germany where they studied at the Academy and University in Münster. *There is a Crocodile under My Bed!* was first published in 1980 and was an immediate success followed by publication in 14 countries. This new edition reflects their modernization of the story. The Schuberts began their careers using colored pencil and then added pastels as a key technique in their books. Now they enjoy mixing media, such as acrylics and soft pastels. Appreciating the tactile experience of real materials, they never use the computer. The pastel background invites the shadows of the characters' night play and the hazy appearance of a night context. The more focused Sophie and Carl are when engaged in a project or game, the brighter and crisper the background is to imply what would be a daytime activity.

First published in 1980, the authenticity of the story, outside the credentials of the author/illustrator team, lies in the universality of this portrayal of a young child's imagination. Finding a creature under the bed or elsewhere in the house is a universal theme in literature as many children are cautious about going to bed, being in the dark,

and separations from parents. How these books approach the creature in the bedroom is where stories take on a variety of unique plots that are directed by either fear or bold engagement with the night visitor. Sophie's spunky personality comes through in her few words supported by energized images that come to life with the turning of the page.

There Is a Crocodile under My Bed! provides a welcoming entrance into the artistry and humor of this unique couple and is a rich resource for themes such as fear of the night, unlikely friendships, and imagination at work and play. Paired with other books by the Schubert's, such as *The Tiny Mouse* (2013), *Elephant Soup* (2013), or *The Umbrella* (2011), young readers can identify with characters, discuss how the author/illustrators create their art, especially their characters, and consider the elements of humor that reflect everyday life as well as the imagination. This book could also be paired with titles that focus on a monster living in the bedroom, such as *Where the Wild Things Are* (Maurice Sendak, 1984), *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* (Mercer Mayer, 1968), *There's an Alligator under My Bed* (Mercer Mayer, 1987), or *There's a Dragon Downstairs* (Hillary McKay, 2005).

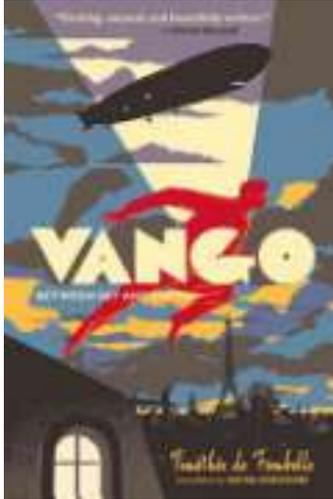
More information about the book or its creators can be found on their website.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas



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Book Review: *Vango: Between Sky and Earth*
Written by Timothee de Fombelle
Translated from French by Sarah Ardizzone
Walker Books, 2014, 432 pp.
ISBN: 9780763671969

Like *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, this book brings a feeling of complete immersion into adventure. This intricate story of a young orphan boy Vango moves constantly between many times and spaces, from Paris to a remote island in Sicily and then to Moscow, a castle in Scotland, New York, and the belly of the German Zeppelin in the sky. We watch how the powerful forces of European politics rule the fate of ordinary people—and learn about rising Fascism and the horrors of Stalinism. We watch a small group of people, who met in the trenches of the Great War, supposedly the last war and who swear to fight these who sell armaments and promote war. We see a boy and a girl who fall in love and stay faithful to their choice even though they do not see each other for many years.

As is often the case for the adventure novel, this volume is full of implausible coincidences and impossible meetings, horrible betrayals and heroic deeds. We follow the book's protagonists to the roofs of Paris, to a tiny island with an invisible monastery, and to the secret premises of the Stalin's dacha, searching for deep family secrets and for hidden royal treasures. Readers, of course, need to suspend belief and hold their breath, trying to guess whether Vango will ever again see the love of this life, Ethel. Will he be able to reunite with the mysterious Mademoiselle who raised him, an orphan after the tragic death, or rather the murder, of his parents? Who is his father, and why does the mighty Russian dictator wants him dead?

Vango has too many enemies, and not only in Russia. But he also has a lot of friends—a monk-hermit Zepiro, who abandoned his monastic vacation and sets out to kill for the sake of peace, a German commander who flies a powerful Zeppelin and secretly transports the enemies of the Third Reich out of harm, and even a simple-minded fisherman who is partially responsible for Vango's being an orphan. The mixture of historical and fictional characters, as in the novels of Alexandre Dumas, give the story of Vango, a new d'Artagnan, a strong feeling of reality in spite of the phantasmagoric elements of the narrative and make the book a page turner with a strong antiwar message.

The book is full of adventures, but they are not the most important and interesting part. Love and compassion and small ordinary people who try to fight forces of the powerful and the rich entice readers to dream about a second volume a minute after finishing the first. Originally written in French, the second book, *A Prince without a Kingdom* (2015),

just came out in English translation. In this volume readers travel with Vango to New York and witness the struggles of the French resistance in Paris occupied by the Nazis.

Timothee de Fombelle is a French writer and a playwright. He is best known for his young adult novels about Vango and novels about a miniature (a millimeter and a half tall) boy Toby, *Toby Alone* (2010) and its sequel, *Toby and the Secret of the Tree* (2010) both translated by Sarah Ardizzone. *Toby Alone* won numerous awards and was translated into many languages.

Sarah Ardizzone is a translator, critic and journalist from France who has published over 40 translations for adults and children. She received the Scott-Moncrieff Prize for translation and was awarded the Marsh Prize for Children's Literature in Translation in 2005 and 2009.

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