

Focus IBBY

by CAROLINA BALLESTER

It is with great excitement, and a little bit of nervousness, that I am writing for *Bookbird* for the very first time as IBBY executive director.

I started working with and for children's books ten years ago when I joined the Shanghai International Children's Book Fair organizing team. There, I was lucky enough to witness the astonishing development of the Chinese children's literature scene. I also met a great number of writers, illustrators, publishers, and reading promoters from all around the world—many of whom became friends. I immediately admired their boundless dedication to children. This gave me a rapid realization: I would never want to work in another field. So, it is a big honor to officially be part of the IBBY family, a community that embodies the values and commitments of “children's book people” better than any other.

So, what job—a real one, not a dream one—allows you, on your very first day in office, to travel across the planet to attend one of the most anticipated children's literature events in the world? This is exactly how my IBBY life started on September 1, 2022, when Liz Page and I hopped on a plane from Zürich to Kuala Lumpur to attend the 2022 IBBY International Congress.

“The Power of Stories”: Insights on the 38th World IBBY Congress in Putrajaya, Malaysia

In March 2022, the Malaysian authorities announced that the country would lift all COVID-19 restrictions for international travelers, paving the way for the 38th IBBY International Congress to take place as a fully in-person event. It was certainly a huge relief since an IBBY World Congress requires four to five years of intense preparation work. Despite the uncertainties and slowness of the pandemic years, the Congress Committee was ready to welcome all guests, speakers, and delegates from September 5 to 8 in Putrajaya, the administrative and judiciary capital of Malaysia. The preparations were spearheaded by Ahmad Redza Ahmad Khairuddin, president of the Malaysian Board on Books for Young People (MBBY), who also acted as the Congress chair, while the MBBY vice president, Sidin Ahmad Ishak, served as chair of the Congress Scientific Committee.

The event, the first IBBY World Congress organized in Southeast Asia, was held in Kompleks Perbadanan Putrajaya. One auditorium, two ballrooms, and three meeting rooms were mobilized to host nineteen plenary speeches and sixty-one parallel presentations. In addition, several special exhibitions organized by IBBY International and some of its longtime partners were on display in the congress center lobby, together with a space dedicated to poster sessions. Throughout the Congress, numerous MBBY members oversaw on-site services and acted as moderators, masters of ceremony, and technical coordinators. They were backed up in their duties by a joyful team of student volunteers eager to expand their language skills and knowledge of literature.

Over 300 participants attended this four-day event and around forty countries were represented among the speakers and attendants. While most national delegations were made up of no more than one or two representatives, transcultural conversations rapidly bloomed everywhere, reflecting the purest spirit of IBBY.



The Congress launched on the morning of Monday, September 5, with an opening ceremony where Zhang Mingzhou delivered his final speech as IBBY president. He said:

International understanding is essential for peace and prosperity and as members of IBBY we believe that it can be achieved through children's books despite new challenges and uncertainties. Not only is IBBY's mission of bringing children and books together

as important as ever in our endlessly changing world, but we are facing new challenges as the danger of climate change and the resulting havoc affects every corner of our fragile world.

Honorary Membership was bestowed to Ellis Vance for his outstanding contribution to the development of IBBY since he joined the Executive Committee in 2006, first as IBBY vice president and, from 2008 until the end of 2022, as treasurer. The ceremony was concluded with an intergenerational performance mixing storytelling and traditional dance. For many people, this was their first contact with Malaysian culture.

Discovering Malaysian Children's Literature and Culture

IBBY Congresses are not merely occasions for the IBBY community to meet and celebrate the organization's most important awards and projects; they are also a unique chance to dive into the host country's children's literature.

In this very sense, the keynote speech following the opening ceremony was dedicated to *pantun*, a Malay traditional verse form, characterized by its carefully balanced rhythms used to express intricate ideas and emotions.

Below is an example of a *pantun* for children in Malay and English:

Buah cempedak di luar pagar,
Ambil galah tolong jolokkan.
Saya Budak baru belajar,
Kalau salah tolong tunjukkan

The cempedak fruit outside the fence,
Grab a pole and bring it down.
I am a newbie take no offense,
Please correct me if I am wrong

After the keynote session, "The Power of Malaysian Stories" panel approached Malaysian youth literature through the concepts of diversity and inclusivity (Sharifah Aishah Osman), the regional outreach of Malaysian traditional stories (Heidi Shamsuddin), and the experiences of

a folktale writer (Tuttu Duta).

Malaysian children's illustration was not neglected in the program, either. On Thursday morning (September 8), a plenary session was held to celebrate Yusof Gajah and LAT—two of the country's most revered artists. Gajah, who sadly passed away in March 2022, is recognizable for the playful elephants populating his many books. Meanwhile, seventy-one-year-old LAT embodies Malaysia's modern cartoon culture and has enjoyed great international success since the publication of *Kampung Boy* (1979). The works of these two artists were also exhibited in the conference center lobby.

Exhibitions

As tradition dictates, selections from IBBY book collections traveled along to the Congress for special exhibition. The showcase encompassed the 2022 IBBY Hans Christian Andersen winners' and finalists' books, as well as twenty titles recommended as outstanding by the jury among the candidates' works; the 2022 IBBY Honour List; the 2021 Selection of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities; and the 2021 Silent Book collection. Together with these IBBY exhibitions, illustrations from the Biennale of Illustration Bratislava, the Nami Concours, and information about the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA)—all three longtime partners of IBBY—were presented.

The Congress organizers made the exhibitions available to a wider audience through an innovative online platform that can still be viewed on the Congress website (www.ibbycongress2022.org/).

Unfolding the Red Carpet to the IBBY Award Winners

The 38th IBBY Congress was also the occasion to meet all 2022 IBBY award winners in person. On the first evening of the Congress, the program cast a spotlight on the IBBY Reading Promotion Awards with the presentation of the 2022 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award winner. The Pinnguaqta project of the Ilitagsiniq-Nunavut Literacy Council promotes and supports literacy initiatives in the official languages of Nunavut with respect for the principles of community capacity building and development. Adriana Kusugak and her colleague Kayylynn Kusugak had traveled for around fifty hours from Rankin Inlet (Nunavut, Canada) to Kuala Lumpur to represent their organization and accept the award. Their work was presented through a moving video and a speech. A diploma and a mock US\$10,000 check were presented to the winner by IBBY Reading Promotion Award Jury President Sylvia Vardell and the award sponsor represented by the Asahi-Shinbun bureau chief in Singapore, Koji Nishimura.

After a short break, the IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award dinner continued with the presentation of its winners, Zohreh Ghaeni and Jane Kurtz. Announced in 2018, the IBBY-iRead award is



the youngest of all IBBY awards, honoring two outstanding individuals working to promote the expansion and development of children's reading.

Zohreh Ghaeni is the founder of the Read with Me program for children of deprived areas in Iran. A well-known figure within the IBBY world, she chaired the Hans Christian Andersen Jury in 2008 and 2010 and had served on the Executive Committee from 2016 to 2020. Zohreh gave a very

intimate presentation of her journey through the personal experiences that inspired her to become a reading promoter. This project allows high-quality books to be accessible to children who normally have no access to books, such as street and working children, those living in remote and deprived areas, and those living in crisis due to unrest, natural disaster, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

After Zohreh, it was Jane Kurtz's turn to present her project on the stage. She started her speech by insisting on the collective nature of her publishing project Ethiopia Reads, giving recognition to the whole community of people who take part—educators, artists, translators, and her family members—especially her brother Chris and her American/Ethiopian granddaughter Leyla, both of whom traveled

with her to Putrajaya. Since its inception in 1998, Ethiopia Reads, in partnership with Open Hearts Big Dreams, has published a collection of 130 fiction and nonfiction books in English and Ethiopian local languages, distributed through schools and villages, sometimes on a donkey's back. In many cases, those books become the first books the children will hold in their hands.

The two winners received their awards from Jury President Sylvia Vardell. The Shenzhen iRead Foundation, the award sponsor, sent a video message to congratulate the winners since they could not travel to Malaysia due to travel restrictions.

The second day of the Congress (September 6) was also full of celebrations. The 2022 IBBY Honour List was presented in the morning through a video featuring the 163 titles nominated by fifty-four IBBY National

Sections. Diplomas and gifts, prepared by the Congress organizers, were handed out to around twenty nominees who were present. The remaining diplomas were distributed to the representatives of the National Sections who attended the Congress. In the afternoon, Baek Hee-na, winner of the 2020 ALMA, presented her work in conversation with Elina Drucker, a member of the ALMA jury.

After the afternoon parallel sessions, all the Congress attendants returned to the auditorium



for one of the highlights of every IBBY Congress: the Hans Christian Andersen (HCAA) Award ceremony. After a welcome and introduction by Jury President Junko Yokota, Ms. Lee Kye Young from Nami Island Inc. gave a short address to the audience as the sponsor of the awards.

Marie-Aude Murail, 2022 HCAA winner in the Author category, was described by the jury president in the following words:

In many ways she embodies the values of IBBY. She is committed to the cause of children and reading, observing the world seriously and with humor and optimism opening numerous windows on the major stakes of contemporary society.

A very happy and proud Marie-Aude Murail went onstage accompanied by her daughter Constance, acting as her translator. The duo offered a lively performance as Marie-Aude's acceptance speech took the audience to revisit her family roots and early interest for storytelling and theater, things that shaped her career as a writer.

Following Marie-Aude's speech, Junko Yokota introduced Suzy Lee, the 2022 HCAA winner in the Illustration category:



Suzy Lee challenges herself to create wordless picture books that tell a simple truth in the cleanest, most effortless way possible. She is known for her...balancing of the physical properties of a print book with the philosophical interpretation that led to emotional discoveries, often through an exploration of childhood play.

After thanking the members of the 2022 jury, sponsors, and the people who nominated her, as well as her publishers and readers across the world, Suzy Lee started her speech underlining the importance of *Alice in Wonderland* in her artistic life. She mentioned how the infinite curiosity of young Alice and the absurdness of the wonderland universe had unleashed the freedom of spirit necessary for her to become a picturebook artist.

The two laureates received their medals and diplomas from Zhang Mingzhou and Junko Yokota. The ensuing joint photo session revealed the beautiful complicity that arose between the two winners, who, despite never having met each other in person, had filled their acceptance speeches with notes of admiration and humorous hints about each other's work.

The Power of Reading: Reading Promotion, Reading Practices, and Development

Reading promotion and literacy development became central threads of the Congress. Many of the speeches given over the nineteen plenary sessions

focused on the transformative power of stories (Carole Bloch, “Revaluing Stories a Meaningful Early Literacy Learning”), on their role as integration tools (Nur Azlina Abdul Aziz, “Educating Rohingyas”), or their use as tools for psychological healing (Shereen Kreidieh, “Transforming the Way Children Learn through Stories: Experience from Lebanon”). Many of the sixty-one papers presented in the parallel sessions also offered case studies of reading development and bibliotherapy projects from all over the world.

Time for IBBY: General Assembly and Elections

As IBBY enters its eighth decade, the Congress organizers invited long-standing IBBY friends to talk about the past, present, and future of the organization. Patsy Aldana, Liz Page, Ellis Vance, and Sylvia Vardell as moderator shared countless anecdotes about IBBY and talked about the challenges it is facing at present.

The 38th Congress also hosted the first in-person IBBY General Assembly since 2018. Outgoing president Zhang Mingzhou welcomed all the delegates to the meeting. A gratifying fifty-one National Sections took part, either as participants or through proxy. The General Assembly elected Sylvia Vardell as the new IBBY president for the term 2022-2024. The 2022-2024 Executive Committee was also elected, with six new members and four serving a second term. Anastasia Arkhipova was elected as 2024 HCAA Jury president.

The chair of the IBBY Trust, Patricia Aldana, presented a new initiative called “Friends of IBBY” designed to invite publishers sharing the values of IBBY to support the work of the IBBY international office in Basel. A full report of the IBBY activities and finances was introduced jointly by Liz Page and Ellis Vance, including a review of *Bookbird*, by the chair of Bookbird Inc., Valerie Coghlan.

After the General Assembly, the day ended in a joyful atmosphere at the gala dinner hosted by Putrajaya Corporation, to which all Congress delegates were invited.

The Congress closed the next morning. Redza Khairuddin thanked all speakers and participants before giving the floor to Chiara Pinton, representing IBBY Italy as the organizer of the next Congress, planned for August 30 to September 1, 2024, in Trieste. The very last act of the Congress came as a surprise, although it was the result of a very detailed and secret plan organized by the outgoing Executive Committee. Liz Page was honored with the Jella Lepman Medal after twenty-five years of dedication to IBBY in her various capacities at the IBBY Secretariat.

“No one more than Liz deserves this Medal,” said Ellis Vance. She was also presented with a commemorative book containing pictures and memories from her countless IBBY friends. Beyond its beauty, the gift brings us back



to the theme of this successful Congress, “The Power of Stories”:

Our stories are what make us who we are, as an individual and as a society in general.

All the Congress sessions were recorded and are accessible on the MBBY/Malaysian Board on Books for Young People YouTube channel.

The full program and digital exhibitions can be viewed on the Congress website: www.ibbycongress2022.org/. Digital proceedings and presentations are being compiled by the Congress organizers and will soon be available on the MBBY website: www.mbbby.org.

A wide range of pictures taken at the Congress is available on the MBBY official Facebook page: @malaysiaibby.

Carolina Ballester

International Children’s Book Day 2023

With the dawn of a new year comes a new cycle for International Children’s Book Day, celebrated since 1969 annually on or around April 2. The sponsorship of the 2023 International Children’s Book Day has been undertaken by the Greek section of IBBY. The message is written by Vagelis Iliopulos and illustrated by Photini Stephandini.

I am a book—You are a book—We are all books

I’m a book.

You are a book.

We are all books.

Our soul is in the story we tell.

Every book is another story.

Every book is another way to narrate.

We can be different, some big, some small, some colorful, some black and white, some with a few pages, some with many.

We may agree or say completely different things, but that’s our beauty.

It would be boring to be all the same.

Each of us is unique. And we have the right to be respected, to be read without prejudice, to be given space in your library.

You can judge us and make comments. You can put us back in the library or hold us and travel with us a long way.

But never let someone throw us away or send us to another shelf. Never ask for our destruction, nor allow anyone else to do it.

And if a book ever comes from another shelf, because someone or something drove it away, make room. It fits next to you. Feel as it feels. Try to understand it. You may be in its place tomorrow.

Because you are a book, too.

Come on, say it loud so everyone can hear you:

"I am a book. Read me. Respect me."

Vagelis Iliopoulos
Athens, 2023



Carolina Ballester was born in Paris and studied in Spain and France, obtaining an MA in Political Science from the Madrid Complutense University and degrees in Chinese and Arabic from the French National Institute of Oriental Studies (INALCO). She worked as a translator and as cultural attaché at the Consulate of Spain in Shanghai. In 2013, she joined the Shanghai International Children's Book Fair team as programme manager and during ten years she promoted and developed international interest in children's illustration as well as served on juries for children's illustration catalogues and contests. Carolina brings to IBBY an interest and wide knowledge in children's literature and illustration, as well as international experience and fluency in several languages, including French, Spanish, English and Mandarin. Carolina joined IBBY as Executive Director on 1 September 2022.

Funny, crazy, and nonsensical episodes are loosely framed by a recurring plot. All stories begin with the call, "Hey, hey, hey, taxi!"; the first-person narrator gets into a taxi, drives somewhere, and returns "home, home to you" at the end. The journeys vary in length. Sometimes they are quite "brisk," sometimes they lead to encounters with pirates on the high seas, with short-necked giraffes and a king who thinks the earth is the head of a giant. Taxis and their drivers are creatively varied in the many-faceted stories. Lively dialogue lends an ironic-parodic character to the various scenes. The oral tone of the narrative and many word inventions characterize Saša Stanišić's imaginative language. Katja Spitzer's brightly colored, comic-like pop-up aesthetic, paired with surreal elements, enriches the entertaining reading impression. It invites the reader to vary the subjects. This title is nominated for the 2022 German Children's Literature Award.

Jury of the German Children's Literature Award



Hey, Hey, Hey, Taxi!

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