

Migration and translations

IBBY World Congress, London 2012

ROBIN MALAN

Former chairperson of IBBY SA

This was the second International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) World Congress I have attended as a representative of IBBY SA, having been at the congress held in Copenhagen in 2008. This year's was held in London at Imperial College, just behind the Royal Albert Hall and in the heart of London's museumland. The theme of the Congress was *Migrations and translations*.

IBBY SA was represented by both its then-outgoing/now-outgone(!) chairperson (me) and its incoming chairperson, Nonikiwe Mashologu. It turned out that there were more South Africans at the congress than at any other (except, of course, for the Cape Town one in 2004, still fondly recalled by a number of people I met in London). Also attending were Genevieve Hart of UWC, Carole Bloch of Praesa at UCT, Judith Inggs of Wits, Thomas van der Walt of Unisa, with Sally-Ann Partridge coming to receive her Honour List certificate on the Saturday. Later, we met up with the South Africans now resident in the UK, Beverley Naidoo and Dianne Hofmeyr.

Day One

The opening was followed by the panel of three children's book laureates:

- ▶ Michael Morpurgo, wonderful at telling stories, especially one about his visit to a school in Soweto
- ▶ Anthony Browne, tracing how his illustrations follow and develop from his playing the 'Shape Game', and
- ▶ Julia Donaldson, who goes in for silly songs from her busking days, including Nonikiwe volunteering as an African pig!

Spark catchers

Tide twists on the Thames and lifts the Lea to the brim of Bow
 Where shoals of sirens work by way of the waves.
 At the fire factory the fortress of flames
 In tidal shifts East London Lampades made
 Millions of matches that lit candles for the well-to-do
 And the ne'er-do-well to do alike. Strike.
 The greatest threat to their lives was
 The sulferuous spite-filled spit of diablo
 The molten madness of a spark
 They became spark catchers and on the word 'strike'
 a parched arched woman would dive
 With hand outstretched to catch the light.
 And land like a crouching tiger with fist high
 Holding the malevolent flare tight
 'til it became an ash dot in the palm. Strike.
 The women applauded the magnificent grace
 The skill it took, the pirouette in mid air
 The precision, perfection and the peace.
 Beneath stars by the bending bridge of Bow
 In the silver sheen of a phosphorous moon
 They practised Spark Catching.
'The fist the earth the spark it's core
The fist the body the spark it's heart'
 The Matchmakers march. Strike.
 Lampades The Torch bearers
 The Catchers of light.
 Sparks fly Matchmakers strike.

Poem written by Lemn Sissay

In the evening came the announcement of the Asahi Awards to two projects from Argentina and Cambodia. At the reception afterwards we met up with other friends of IBBY SA: Barbara Lehman of the United States IBBY, Birgitta Fransson, ex-Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, Vagn Plenge of Danish IBBY, Agnes Gyr of Rwanda, and Evaline Barongo of Uganda.

Day Two

The day's activities centred mainly around translation:

- ▶ first, Emer O'Sullivan told us hair-raising stories of the cavalier way some translators and publishers treat the original stories
- ▶ Aidan Chambers was good, talking about his own work (don't think he bothered too much about the fact that he was supposed to be talking about translating), and
- ▶ in a small-group session, we heard from Judith Inggs of Wits and then from South African author Beverley Naidoo about more translation transgressions.

Regional discussions took place during the afternoon IBBY forum. Eight African delegates and two sympathisers had a pretty inconclusive meeting about the way forward, after the Unisa-initiated meeting held in Polokwane last year.

Day Three

The morning plenary session was a superlatively articulate account of his work, life, values, and humanity by Shaun Tan, the Chinese-Malaysian-Australian-English illustrator. At the tea break he had the longest book-signing queue imaginable – they had to keep him there until the end of the lunch break!

The main event of the afternoon was the presentation of the Honour List of books, made important for us because our English author nominee Sally-Ann Partridge managed to be present to receive her certificate (not quite incapacitated by a spider-bite in her foot). Her Honour List-nominated book **Fuse** was on display with the other Honour List books from many other countries.

In the evening came the gala reception and the awarding of the Hans Andersen Awards to Argentinian author Maria Teresa Andruetta and Czech illustrator Peter Sis. This all happened in the vast bowels and entrails of the Science Museum. Perhaps not the ideal venue for the poorly amplified speeches, but certainly ... interesting!

Day Four

South African author Beverley Naidoo was one of four to lead the morning plenary session, which was all about rendering folk tales. Beverley had interesting things to tell about Aesop probably being an African taken into slavery. Three expert storytellers told stories in Welsh, Arabic and Mongolian.

At a later session during the morning Michael Rosen reading poems about his parents, his childhood and his Jewishness was a total joy.

The General Assembly took place in the afternoon, unfortunately not attended by our official delegate Nonikiwe Mashologu, who had been taken ill and so was unable to attend two days of the Congress (though I know she did have a very fruitful discussion with Barbara Lehman from USBBY and a few of her colleagues, which Nonikiwe said was an informative session about some of the IBBY Twinning partnerships around the world).

I sat in on the Assembly, but couldn't take any part as Nonikiwe was the official delegate and one has to arrange proxy well beforehand. Fortunately the General Assembly decided to elect and vote *en bloc* and so no IBBY SA vote was required.

A final treat of the closing ceremony was poet Lemn Sissay reading his poem *Migration RSVP* and his recent Olympics poem, *Spark catchers* (page xx). He brought the London Congress to a very satisfying close.

The next IBBY World Congress will be on 10-13 September 2014 in Mexico City

Sally-Ann Partridge

Biographical info

Sally-Ann Partridge is a young adult novelist from Cape Town whose first novel, **The Goblet Club**, won the English category in the *You/Huisgenoot I am a Writer competition* in 2007 as well as the MER Youth Prize at the M-Net Via Afrika Awards in 2008.

Her critically-acclaimed style of writing is so popular with the South African youth that it was adapted into a school play entitled **Gif**. Her second novel **Fuse** was published in 2009.

Sally currently works as the editor of a national publication.

She was named one of the *Mail & Guardian's* 200 Young South Africans of 2011.

Books by Sally-Ann Partridge

Dark Poppy's demise.- Human & Rousseau, 2011.

Fuse.- Human & Rousseau, 2009.

The Goblet Club.- Human & Rousseau, 2007.

Awards

Fuse - shortlisted for the Percy Fitzpatrick Prize

Fuse - chosen as IBBY South Africa's English nomination for the IBBY International Honour Roll 2012.

The Goblet Club - Winner of the English category in the *You/Huisgenoot I am a Writer competition* in 2007

The Goblet Club - MER Prys vir Jeuglektuur (2008)



◀ Back: Birgitta Fransson, Robin Malan, Sally-Ann Partridge, Beverley Naido. Front: Genevieve Hart, Dianne Hofmeyr

▶ Sally-Ann Partridge's book, *Fuse*, on display



◀ Nonikiwe Mashologu and Robin Malan with members of Japan IBBY

