

Beyond the Book:  
Transforming Children's Literature



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Edited by

Bridget Carrington and Jennifer Harding

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P U B L I S H I N G

Beyond the Book: Transforming Children's Literature,  
Edited by Bridget Carrington and Jennifer Harding

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# INTRODUCTION

## BRIDGET CARRINGTON

When you open a book it's like going to the theater. First you see the curtain. Then it is pulled aside and the show begins.

(Cornelia Funke, *Inkheart*)

Voiced by the character Mo, a bookbinder and father to *Inkheart*'s heroine Meggie, Cornelia Funke's description of the potential power in the physical act of opening a book and seeing the endpapers is a particularly apt introduction to this collection of papers. They are the product of the 2012 joint annual conference of IBBY UK and the MA course at the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature (NCRCL), organised on that occasion by the NCRCL and held at Roehampton University. This conference focused on the many and varied aspects of literature for children that are interpreted in physical ways, and might therefore be considered 'Beyond the Book'.

The beauty of books is that each one of us, reading a book, imagines our own version of the story that the text on the page describes. Nevertheless, when the first books for young people appeared, it became obvious that their imaginations might benefit from a little extra help. From woodcut to e-book, children's literature has always lent itself to reinterpretation and expansion. In its early days this was achieved through different forms of retelling, through illustration, and, as developments in paper, printing and publishing allowed, those illustrations began to leave the page and create their own world through interactive illustration (generally 'movables': pop-ups, tabs and flaps). By the 1930s in Britain, S. Louis Giraud's pioneering cheap productions advertised their wonders through enticing slogans appended to the titles of each of his series: 'Introducing Self-Erecting Models', and 'With Pictures That Spring Up In Model Form', and 'With Pictures That Spring To Life'. Our cover image shows a later master at work in this genre, with Jan Pieńkowski's monster rising up to thrill and terrify young readers of his 1979 pop-up book *Haunted House*. Papers delivered to the conference, and included in our collection, examine the development of the movable book in Britain, and

then how the skills of simple paper engineering can be taught to children to enhance their engagement with literature.

From its earliest origins, literature for children had also begun to move even further beyond the book through music, for example with nursery rhymes, and thence over time to stage, film and television adaptation. The contributors to the 2012 conference also explored these ways in which we transform literature intended for children, and celebrated the vibrant world of creativity that has sought and continues to seek different ways in which to engage young readers. It is clear from the first paper, examining material devised *before* publishers produced books specifically intended for children, that a comprehension of the need to create suitable material and to enliven reading and learning was already developing, and led in turn to the commercial enterprise of children's publishing. That individualised material for particular children continued to exist once books were available is demonstrated within that paper, and in the fact that parents and teachers in the twenty-first century continue to produce items specific to their children. Another contributor describes the commercial interpretation of this child-specific need, with adaptations to ways of accessing literature through tactile materials and alternative technologies.

Engaging young readers and extending their reading experience has been the aim of the adults who promote those groups which encourage children to 'shadow' the critical machinery around book awards such as the Carnegie and Greenaway. Allied to this is a paper that discusses the rise in America of OPWs (online participatory writing communities) that nurture young writers, readers and critics whose responses, the paper's author argues, could influence the future direction of books for young adults there. Electronic access to and interaction with books becomes an increasingly important aspect of literature of all sorts, and accordingly there are several chapters that consider the impact of the internet as a resource for learning, and how e-books help to determine what and how children read and react to their reading, both in the UK and further afield. They also examine the development of associated material such as games and virtual worlds, and the influence that this new media has on both the content and promotion of literature for children in the twenty-first century. At the same time, electronic media are being employed to make available and tempt this century's readers into older material, as niche publishers and fan clubs, particularly for girls' school fiction of the first half of the twentieth century, continue to grow, thrive and publish this material for a new readership. In acknowledging the importance of electronic realisations of books and book-related material, and especially apps, our contributors recognise their particular relevance to young adults, but

another chapter reminds us of the pioneering work undertaken by the editors of twentieth-century imprints such as Penguin Peacocks and Macmillan Topliners, targeted at a young adult audience.

Having created and refined the interactive (paper) book in the nineteenth and twentieth century, twenty-first century illustrators and artists must look afresh at their work. Two papers in particular reveal how this is happening, revealing how, in an effort to compete with digital media, illustration itself must reach 'beyond the book' not only for its content but also for its style. One contributor examines how an artist uses books as a physical medium for their art, building re-creations of fairy tales from the books themselves. A chapter on a Portuguese publishing house reveals the innovative attitudes to picture-book illustration that are to be found there, attitudes that have encouraged the world-wide translation of many of these titles. Artists have also been hugely influential in another, rather unlikely, reimagining of children's books, in the contribution they have made to fashion, both in 'dressing-up' and everyday children's wear. Kate Greenaway, Frances Hodgson Burnett's vision (and her illustrator's interpretation) of Little Lord Fauntleroy and Walt Disney all have much to answer for in this respect.

The mention of Disney brings us, of course, to those papers that examine just how far beyond the original books stage, screen and television have taken us. We celebrate the use of community festivals to encourage greater involvement with all aspects of literacy, and the transformation of a wordless graphic novel through a collaboration of different theatre arts. A major playwright/adaptor's talk to the conference audience is reported, revealing how the adaptation of books into plays, and thence onto the stage, considerably widens the audience that can access the author's work, while retaining the spirit of the original (and the approval of the original author). Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* (1988) engendered both a film (1996) and a stage play, *Matilda: the Musical* (2010), and the transition from paper to greasepaint resulted in some interesting reinterpretations of the character of the heroine herself. Regeneration brings us to television and *Dr Who*, and a paper that considers the influence of established literary themes in the ethos of different writers' contributions to this series, and in particular the influence of J.M. Barrie's various re-imaginings of *Peter Pan* in one writer's episodes.

All of which demonstrates how literature for children has always acknowledged the need to engender innovation, to regenerate itself to fit its audience and its time, and to move 'beyond the book'. The conference also ably demonstrated how in 2012 the students of children's literature

themselves constantly interpret, reinterpret and challenge the material that has been produced for young people over the centuries.

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Cover illustration from Jan Pieńkowski's *Haunted House* (1979). Copyright © 1979, 2005 Jan Pieńkowski. Reproduced on the cover courtesy Jan Pieńkowski.

Cover illustration and background photographed and designed by Lisa Boggiss Boyce from her collection of pop-up books. Copyright © 2012 Lisa Boggiss Boyce. Cover produced by Lisa Boggiss Boyce.



# BEFORE THE BOOK? MANUSCRIPT, HOUSEHOLD READING AND THE ORIGINS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

M.O. GRENBY

This paper gives a brief examination of the origins of literature for young people, highlighting the interrelationship of handwritten vernacular texts with printed and published material in the early eighteenth century.

My research over the past few years, and continuing for the foreseeable future, is largely on the origins of children's literature. In particular, my recent work has been concerned with the child *reader* in the long eighteenth century: with who consumed the 'new' children's literature that developed in the mid-eighteenth century. My next project will be an exploration of the other side of the coin, that is to say the *production* of the 'new' children's literature that developed from about the 1740s. I say 'new' because it's pretty clear that what happens in the second half of the eighteenth century is that a new commodity quite quickly became available: a recognisably modern children's literature, commercially produced and successful enough to retain a place in the printing industry from then until, well, now.

But one obvious question to ask about this 'new' children's literature is, was it really so very *new*? Children, of course, were reading before the mid-eighteenth century. And it is difficult to believe that they were limited only to educational books or religious texts (such as the famous Puritan examples), or that they were getting their reading pleasure only from books designed for adults (the classics, or the standard authors, or chapbooks and broadsides). Yet this is what most histories of children's books tell us. So the question is, where does the new children's literature of the mid-eighteenth century come from, if it doesn't emerge *ex nihilo*?

One thing we think we know is that children were immersed in a flourishing oral culture. It certainly seems likely that children consumed

‘literature’ by *hearing* it, perhaps in the form of stories or verse told by their mothers, or (if they were from affluent families) from domestic servants. And it is not difficult to find evidence to support this contention. It can be both prescriptive and anecdotal. For instance, in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, in the final letter of Part II, Pamela, married by then, describes how she entertains and instructs the children of the household with ‘*Nursery Tales and Stories*, with which ... I entertain my Miss Goodwin and my little Boys’:

Let me acquaint you then, that my Method is, to give Characters to Persons I have known in one Part of other of my Life, in feigned Names, whose Conduct may serve for Imitation or Warning, to my dear attentive Miss; and sometimes I give Instances of good Boys and naughty Boys, for the sake of my *Billy*, and my *Danvers*; and they are continually coming about me, Dear Madam, a pretty Story now, cries Miss: And, Dear Madam, tell me of good Boys, and of naughty Boys, cries *Billy*. (Richardson, 1740: Vol. II, Letter CIII to Lady G.)

A description of a domestic idyll follows – with not only the children of the household, but also the servants gathered around to hear the mother’s stories. First, she tells a story about a family of good children contrasted with a family of naughty children; and second, a ‘*Woman’s story*’, for ‘Miss Goodwin’, which is a fairy tale about four characters, Coquetilla, Prudiana, Profusiana and Prudentia.

What we might notice here is that Miss Goodwin is ‘so delighted’ with her story that ‘she has written it down’. This points to what appears to have been a standard practice in the mid-eighteenth century: the use, in the family, of texts written out in manuscript for children’s education. The most celebrated example of a mother who wrote out by hand stories for her children is Jane Johnson, the wife of a vicar in Olney. Her homemade materials for use in her children’s education are now quite well known, having been rediscovered fairly recently and deposited in the Lilly Library in Indiana and the Bodleian Library in Oxford. What’s noticeable is that, at just about the same time as Samuel Richardson was writing *Pamela*, Johnson had composed her own didactic fairy story for her children George and Barbara (‘Bab’) that she called ‘A very pretty Story to tell Children when they are about five or six years of age’. She compiled the book as an array of handmade aides for teaching reading to her four children (Immel, 2002: 28). It begins (showing its evidently personalised nature) like this:

There was a fine Gentleman & a fine Lady & they Lived in a fine House;  
& they were call’d Mr & Mrs Alworthy: They had one little Boy & one

little Girl, the Little Boys name was George, & the little Girl's name was Bab. & Mr & Mrs Alworthy were vastly fond of them both, & Lov'd them Dearly because they were both Good Humour'd, & did every thing in their power to oblige their Father, & Mother, & every body else. & they used every day to have a little Miss & Master of their own age come to play with them; this Miss & Master that came every day to play with them lived in the same Town, & their names were Miss Lucy Manly & Master Tommy Manly ....

A note at the end of the story records:

This story was made in the year 1744 on purpose to tell Miss Barbara-Johnson & her Brother Master George-William-Johnson who took vast Delight in hearing it told over & over again a vast many times by Jane-Johnson.

The question, as Victor Watson puts it, is this:

What remains uncertain is the extent to which Jane Johnson was exceptional – or whether there were hundreds of forgotten mothers creating living nursery cultures like hers. (1997: 45)

Even if Johnson was exceptional, it is difficult not to believe that before children's literature (as it were) children were consuming literature as part of an oral tradition that was at least sometimes recorded in manuscripts made for domestic use (Plate 1).

But now we are beginning to find more evidence that Johnson was not exceptional. A new even earlier handmade book has recently come to light: *The Book of Silvia Cole*, now placed in the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books in Toronto. Dating from c.1719–1720, this new example takes the tradition back earlier. And evidently it was not that the women who were making these books at home were *copying* developments in print in the 1740s; rather, they were *anticipating* – perhaps even inspiring – them.

Indeed, the obvious suggestion then is that a published children's literature superseded this oral and manuscript tradition sometime in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. After all, the first of the 'new' children's books began to appear in the 1730s and 1740s published by Thomas Boreman, Mary Cooper, John Newbery and others. It is not just the chronological coincidence that suggests this (that is to say that these first children's books seem to follow straight on from *Pamela* and Jane Johnson), but also the protestations one often finds in their prefaces.

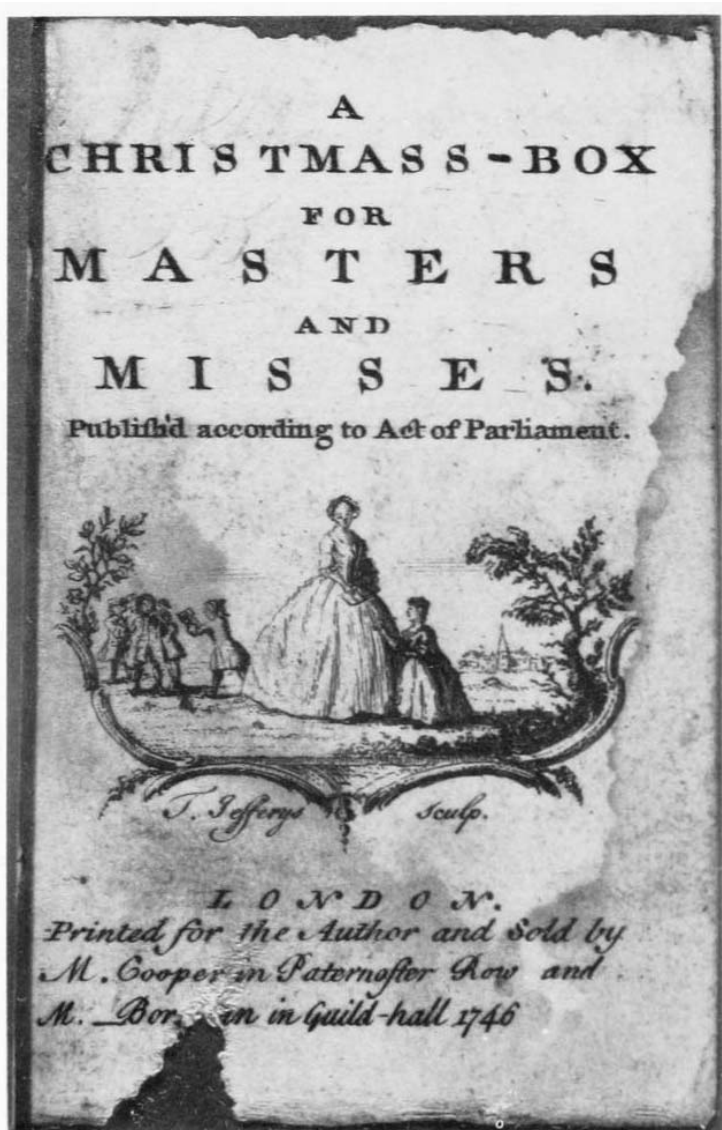


Figure 1 Title page of volume 1 of *A Christmass-Box for Masters and Misses* by 'Mary Homebred'. Reproduced under the terms of the Internet Archive.

Take *A Christmass-Box for Masters and Misses* by ‘Mary Homebred’ in 1746 (Figure 1) This is one of the very earliest examples of the ‘new’ children’s literature and there has been speculation about its author. Brian Alderson (1989: 20) speculated that it might be Mary Cooper, her name being a near anagram of the putative author, Mary Homebred; Andrea Immel (2009: 1), however, has discovered that it was actually by Mary Collyer, a novelist. But what catches my eye is the prefatory address, ‘To the Tender Parents of my Little Benefactors’, in which ‘Mary Homebred’ tells us that she has been herself for many years a mother, and that:

the influence that stories of the like kind as the following have had upon my own Children, is a great Inducement to me to make these Publick.

The stories that follow bear an obvious resemblance to what Pamela and Jane Johnson – and no doubt many other mothers – were telling to their children. They have names like ‘The Good Boy’, ‘The Proud Playfellow’, ‘The Undutiful Child’ and so on.

Such prefaces, explaining that a published children’s book has derived from a story told or given in manuscript to children in the author’s own immediate circle, are extremely common. Indeed, they were a standard feature of children’s books in the 1770s and ’80s and even well beyond. The same claim is made, for instance, by Thomas Percival in the preface to his successful *Father’s Instructions* (1776), written, he said, for ‘the author’s children, for whose use they were solely intended’.

But how much credence should we put in this whole idea of the *supersession* of oral and manuscript traditions by print? There are several reasons why, I think, we should be sceptical.

First, we quickly realise that all these prefatorial statements about manuscripts only reluctantly turned into print conform to certain rhetorical patterns and mask a number of authorial positions. One cannot help notice their similarity to one another – the language is often the same: the hesitant author was ‘persuaded’, ‘induced’, ‘prevailed upon’ to venture into print. Second, the repeated emphasis that the books derive from good mothering is unsurprising, locating the new children’s literature where we expect to find it, as a manifestation of the new ‘cult of motherhood’ that had developed in the second half of the eighteenth century. Providing stories for children – to protect them against the stories told by servants – was central to this new ideal of motherhood as recommended by John Locke and his many followers. And indeed, the storytelling mother herself takes centre stage in many of these children’s books – most obviously in their illustrations (especially frontispieces). One also notices a repeated

insistence that only those who had been mothers (or less often, fathers) were properly qualified to produce children's books.

But what I principally want to take issue with is the idea of *supersession*. What I have come to realise is that the supply of texts in manuscript to children, of homemade books and games, and indeed of oral storytelling, actually continues throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. It was not the case, in short, that commercial publishers appropriated and replaced the manuscript and oral tradition; rather these various traditions continued in parallel.

The most obvious evidence for this is the survival of some manuscript books for children from the later years of the eighteenth century, which are very like those produced by Jane Johnson and for Silvia Cole half a century earlier. One such is the very beautiful handwritten and hand-illustrated text held in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York called *Stories for Miss Cecilia-Charlotte-Esther Burney. Aged five years. Written by Sophia Burney. Printed by Frances Burney*. Forty-eight pages long, comprising eight stories, and with nine ink and watercolour drawings (three of which are by the authors' uncle, Edward Burney); it was produced in 1793. It differs from the Johnson material only because it was written for siblings and cousins (not sons and daughters) by Frances and Sophia Burney (nieces of Frances Burney d'Arblay), then only 15 and 16 years old (Crown, 2006). Or take an even later example, Jane Cotton Boucher de Montizambert's 'The Sad Tale of Mrs Mole and Mrs Mouse', handwritten and hand illustrated in around 1849, and also now in the Osborne Collection in Toronto. Indeed, there are many other examples, and more no doubt still to be found, not to mention all those that have been destroyed over time, perhaps often precisely because they were so well used.

One thing that is intriguing about these manuscript works is the extent to which they were made to resemble printed children's books. They would echo the size and layout as well as the content of printed books. They would copy their paratextual apparatus too. Their authors frequently handwrote a claim that their book was 'Printed and Bound ...', for instance. And many of these homemade texts are hybrids, combining carefully homemade matter with mass-produced and commercially available materials. Jane Johnson, for instance, incorporated engravings, ornamental printed papers and such like into her stories and instructional aids. (She also mined printed sources for the content.)

These manuscript materials, then, are not *pre*-books, but *post*-books. To an extent they invert the standard idea of the manuscript-print

relationship: it is not that manuscripts turn into books, but that books find their way into the manuscripts.

In fact, the relationship between oral, manuscript and print versions is often even more complicated. One book, Lady Ellenor Fenn's *Fables in Monosyllables* (published by John Marshall in around 1783), gives a nice indication of how inter-fused these different forms of production could be. Its preface is entitled 'To My Little Readers' and explains the book's origins. The book was first written, we are told, for a 'Mas-ter Bro-ther-ton', a boy to whom, we are given to understand, the author was providing an education (and a real person we presume – or are supposed to presume – since his surname was apparently important enough to be given here, even though its three syllables violate the promise made of the book's title that we will encounter only monosyllables). The preface then describes Fenn's *modus operandi*:

One day I met with some nice, clear, large print let-ters; and I cut them out, and stuck them on card; then laid them thus, c-a-t – cat, d-o-g – dog; and he said the words at sight.

Was this not nice?

Then it came in mind to print with a pen for him; so I made tales of the dog, and the cat, and such short words – Should you not jump for joy? – He did.

(1783:xi–xii)

Fenn, we notice, has taken a commercially available product (the printed letters), stuck them onto card herself and turned them in into an educational game. Then she has written in manuscript stories based on this game ('with a pen') and used them with Master Brotherton. And then she has published a book based on these stories: a book that we can hold in our hands. If Fenn's practice was anything to go by, the home produced and the commercially available were continually intertwining.

Our existing histories of children's literature do not take this continuing, interconnected relationship between the oral, the manuscript and the printed into account. But surely when we are thinking about how children's literature began in Britain this is something that we need to consider. Looking merely at the pioneering publishers will not be enough. Equally important for the birth and early development of children's literature will be those amateur authors who continued to produce materials for children in their homes throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth (if not, indeed, beyond). It was surely not the case that the oral and manuscript traditions simply subsided in the face of the newly available commercial books. Rather, what was being printed for

children in London and the provinces continued to be influenced by what people were doing in their homes, just as what stories were being told, and made, in households across the country was often shaped by what had become commercially available.

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# *A MONSTER CALLS:* TRYING NOT TO DRAW

JIM KAY

Jim Kay examines how digital media is influencing book design worldwide, and discusses how random and unexpected events shaped his illustrations for Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls*.

I was recently invited to the 2012 International Book Fair in Frankfurt, to attend the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis (German Children's Literature Award) ceremony. I was fortunate in illustrating Patrick Ness's work of fiction *A Monster Calls*, first published in the UK by Walker Books in 2011, which was nominated for two of the categories. The book fair in Frankfurt is possibly the industry's most important marketplace for books, media rights and licences. It is also big, really big. It took me four hours just to walk around the exhibition spaces. It's a somewhat daunting experience, because it's not until you see the sheer quantity of publishers and their publications on show that it really hits you how huge the industry is and how much competition there is out there.

As an illustrator it's good to know that children's books seem to be doing well in the UK. According to the Publishers' Association Statistics Yearbook, sales of children's books have been increasing for the last three years in the UK, boosted by the growth of books for young adults. Across fiction, non-fiction, children's and academic books, physical sales have actually declined, but have been compensated to some degree by the growth of digital books; indeed, the PA states that sales of e-books increased by 366% in 2011.

How will a growth of digital sales effect children's books? From my own experience, it's all for the better. One series of books, in particular, demonstrates how a publisher can successfully produce 'traditional' books that celebrate the tactile, intimate experience of cradling the object you are reading, while employing the latest advances in technology to go 'beyond the book'. The Ology series of illustrated fantasy books, presented in a fictional encyclopaedic format by Templar Publishing, demonstrates that

there is a demand for high-quality books of a traditional finish. (The volumes are hardback, with covers employing spot varnishes, foils and even plastic ‘gems’ to imbue the object with a sense of value, effectively embracing the feel of a nineteenth-century almanac.) The series works in tandem with a website that further explores the themes of the books; but, notably, one volume, *Drake’s Comprehensive Compendium of Dragonology*, was the first in the UK to employ cutting-edge software and optics known as ‘augmented reality’. Augmented reality uses the ‘real’ or hardcopy of the book as a springboard for some clever animation via a home computer and a web camera. By the computer camera optically recognising the particular position and page of the book the reader is holding, the software makes the illustrations ‘come to life’ on-screen via a real-time relay to the computer. It’s like holding your book up to a mirror, and seeing the book’s reflection come to life – effectively the digital step upwards from a pop-up book.

I am sure it is just a matter of time before a proportion of children’s books exist purely in the digital realm. Graphic novels have already assumed this role, very successfully thanks to digital-comics dealers such as comiXology. This format suits many illustrators of graphic novels, as the majority now create, alter and/or supply their illustrations for publishing in a digital format. It’s a constant issue for illustrators who execute or manipulate their images digitally that printing on paper falls short of the subtle hues and colours achievable onscreen. Backlit devices and screens also lend themselves to the often punchy, graphic illustrations of the genre.

The movement of children’s books into the digital realm need not be divisive. I think digital and hardcopy books can fulfil different needs, and can successfully complement each other. As I’ve mentioned before, there is obviously still a demand for printed books, books that embrace the format, such as Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* and Levi Pinfold’s *The Django*. I believe that digital books are still nowhere near realising their potential. Beyond the obvious – the often cited convenience of purchasing and storing books digitally – I think their greatest strength lies in their flexibility. I can foresee a time when authors and illustrators are able to interact or update works already purchased, almost as one would update software. (Most illustrators never see a book as ‘finished’, just what they managed to do in the time they were given – I’d love the opportunity to go back and change some books.) It may (or may not!) be a pleasant surprise for a child to discover the drawings of characters in a book have moved overnight between pages, or day changes to night in the illustrations, or seasons change over a year.

The interaction between authors and readers has already greatly been facilitated by the internet (reviews by readers are pretty much instantaneous, and there for the world to see and discuss). The shadowing site that accompanies the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenway children's book awards is a superb example of how useful such a tool is for young readers who want to discuss literature. It's manna from heaven for illustrators and authors too – you get instant feedback from the people who matter, no holds barred!

The growing expectations combined with increased computer literacy of young readers will hopefully expedite the evolution of the digital book.

When discussing 'beyond the book', I should also briefly touch on the process of adapting fiction for the screen. (I am currently involved in providing concept art for an adaptation of a novel for a forthcoming BBC1 TV series.) From visiting schools and colleges, I have found it particularly interesting how young readers seem to have a growing understanding of the process of adapting fiction for film and television. We can thank DVDs, their bonus commentaries, slideshows and 'featurettes' for opening up the process of scriptwriting, set design, costume, casting and editing to a new audience. There is no better bridge between school children and the professional world, and, better still, for encouraging young readers to think 'I can do that!'. As an illustrator I can't stress the influence this has had on the business of adaptation, because other artists, illustrators and directors are now, through commentaries, privy to the creative processes of others in the business.

Despite the diversification of publishing thanks to growing digital sales, it's still sometimes surprising how difficult it can be to go against the traditional format of children's books when working as an illustrator. I was extremely lucky in being given the chance to work with the art director, Ben Norland, at Walker Books, who proactively encouraged a more experimental approach to illustrating the text of *A Monster Calls*. This is by no means the norm, but even so I'm still a little surprised by readers who imply the book design is unconventional. Perhaps this is a quiet reminder that book design has been, on the whole, rather staid at times. For myself, I find that 'innovative' children's books in the UK have done no more than retread designs and formats already covered by graphic novels two decades ago. Perhaps the reason we regard French and Japanese book design as more ambitious is because there is less of a stigma with regards to the graphic novel in those countries. Perhaps, also, there is more of a willingness to collide words and pictures with a little more rigour. The graphic-novel format is a little marginalised in the UK and, let's face it, labelled as 'nerdy' – which is a great shame because

there are some genuinely astonishing feats of writing, design and illustration to be found within the genre. Such works have also proved ideal and popular for adaptation to the screen over recent years. I find that people in the business often cite French publishing houses as producers of the most innovative, quirky titles in children's books. While in Frankfurt, I walked among the brightly coloured stalls of French books and I'd have to agree. It's not just the format, it's the content too. Strange, quirky tales that one might imagine would be pretty hard to get past marketing in a UK publishing house. They are not afraid of tackling the dark and dangerous, their love of frightening books for young children has been documented in the past (Coglan, 2012: n.p.), but it's the little oddities I like the most, such as Olivier Tallec's *Waterloo & Trafalgar*, a wordless tale of two suspicious gentlemen living either side of a dividing wall – the story itself can be 'read' in different ways thanks to some clever paper mechanics. I am a little frustrated at times when I hear in England people say a children's book is 'ground breaking' because the typography interacts with the illustrations or the pages don't always read in a particular direction.

It was while working at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, that I first began to scribble down some ideas for a children's book. I had studied illustration at university, but a summer job back in 1997 somehow led to ten years of working in museums and galleries. No matter how comfortable or how enjoyable your job may be, if you don't at least have a crack at the thing you really want to try, there will always be that little voice in the background saying 'what if?'

I worked long hours in my job, but in the evening I started work on an illustration and, through a chance meeting, was later offered the opportunity to exhibit my work at a local-authority gallery in Richmond. I did everything wrong at this point. I had a year to fill two rooms with paintings and artwork whilst working full time, with no money for materials or framing. It was extraordinarily difficult, let alone the practicalities of framing and glazing your own work in a tiny flat.

I was first offered the chance to illustrate *A Monster Calls* back in 2010. At the time I had no confidence in my own draughtsmanship and somewhat daunted by what is an astonishing piece of writing by a well-known author. I was also doubtful whether Patrick Ness's story should be illustrated. When I read his manuscript for *A Monster Calls*, I was struck by how minimal his descriptions of characters were. The concern I had was that the reader would forge a very personal relationship with the text, and any visual depictions of the characters and the monster would inevitably clash with those imagined by the reader.

Given the choice I would have dealt with only ‘stage setting’ the book, effectively creating the visuals for the environment in which the story is couched, and avoid rendering any of the characters or actual events! I do like the idea of building on the author’s creation, but it is, you could argue, a rather cowardly approach to the job in hand. It was the art director at Walker Books, Ben Norland, who suggested illustrating the key scenes in the book and, in particular, the monster. At this point I should mention art directors in children’s publishing, as I think people underestimate the influence and impact they have on the end product. A good art director makes a huge difference to the book as an object. He/she can dictate the pace, rhythm, impact and even the tactile quality to the finished piece. It was Ben who pushed me to address the key scenes in the story, and Ben who suggested that the illustrations bleed from page to page, from plate to text.

I struggle with the idea of representing something ‘frightening’, as the very act of delineating a scary piece of text tends to rob it of the one thing that gives it power and presence, and that’s the reader’s imagination. Fans of horror films know that it’s what you don’t see that frightens you the most, and revealing the ‘monster’ tends to deprive it of its impact. So I decided pretty early on that the characters would appear more as impressions, ambiguous at best, renderings of an emotion (lost, awkward, angry). Patrick Ness did me an enormous favour in providing a monster that was capable of changing shape. (One of the hardest elements of illustrating a book is the continuity of characters from beginning to end. If a book takes a long time to illustrate, your style may inadvertently ‘evolve’ over that period of time.) This gave me the opportunity to alter the monster’s physique to reflect its mood: more human when rested or contemplative (Figure 2), more wild and tree like when animated or angry (Figure 3).

As I mentioned earlier, I was really worried about my ‘style’ or lack of. Starting out in illustration I had suffered a bit from producing images deemed ‘too dark’ for children. The comments book from my exhibition highlighted a dichotomy. Of the 500+ comments, all those by adults said ‘too dark for children’, whereas the numerous younger visitors who left comments said they liked the work because it was gory, frightening or dark. Whom do you try and please? Added to that, I’m one of those annoying illustrators who likes to try a technique that best reflects the brief.