

# 200 years of fascinating fairytales

To celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Hans Christian Andersen, the Australian section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), under the aegis of ALIA, held a full-day seminar entitled 'The Fascination of Fairy Tales' on 2 April in Sydney. Approximately seventy participants attended.

Dr John Foster, the president of IBBY Australia, welcomed the participants, including in his speech a message — which received a warm ovation — from Ms Winnie Vitzansky, secretary general of the Danish Library Association, which gave an idea of the importance of not only Hans Andersen personally to Danish children but also fairytales to the world at large. She concluded with the words:

*'Through the reading of great poets children are taught empathy and basic values for living a full and rewarding life.*

*Libraries give all children the possibility and the inspiration to read, and the possibility to learn and grow.*

*Let us use the occasion of Hans Christian Andersen's 200 years anniversary to remember that in the midst of creating the information society with full ICT skills for all citizens — as important as this is — the libraries still have the duty and the joy of opening the world of fairytales and fantasy to children and adults to enrich our lives.*

*Happy birthday to Hans Christian Andersen and the best of luck with your seminar.'*

The seminar was officially opened by the Danish Consul-General in Australia, Mr Jorgen Mollegaard, who spoke wittily about the central role of Hans Andersen in Danish culture. As a memento of his visit, Mr Mollegaard was presented with a book (in Danish) of Andersen's tales illustrated by the Australian artist Robert Ingpen, himself a winner of IBBY's Hans Christian Andersen Award.

A series of presentations followed that were both entertaining and erudite: 'The Fascination of Fairy Tales' (Dr Maurice Saxby); 'Old Tales, New Readers: Fairy Tale Themes in YA Novels' (Judith Ridge); 'Illustrators of Hans Christian Andersen: a visual literacy approach' (Dr Robyn Morrow); and, a special offering, a panel session featuring two award-winners, author Patricia Wrightson and translator Patricia Crampton, with Maurice Saxby as convenor. For many, this was the highlight of the seminar, for Ms Wrightson is the only Australian author to win IBBY's highest honour, the Hans Christian Andersen Award, while Ms Crampton has been a member of the Award jury. Unfortunately, Robert Ingpen, the only Australian illustrator to have won the Award, was unable to attend.

The seminar featured a slide of the late Ena Noël, IBBY Australia's first president, next to a sculpture of Hans Christian Andersen, lending symbolic weight to the link between IBBY and the great Danish writer. After all, he is the guiding inspiration — and almost the patron saint — of the organisation because, with his birth, children's literature as it is known today was born, too.

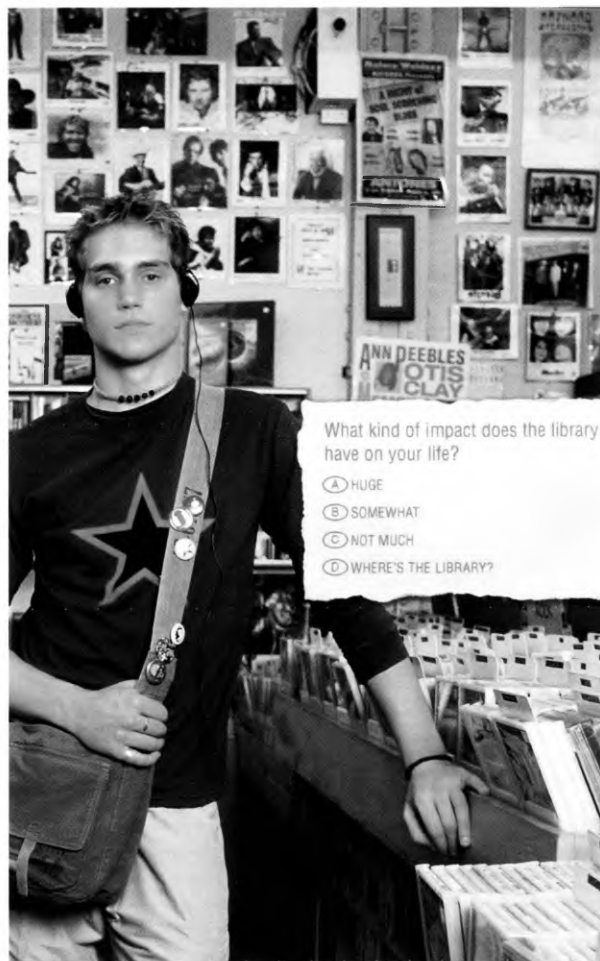
The success of the day was not merely dependent on the quality of the papers and obvious camaraderie between the participants — or even the telling of two Andersen tales over lunch — for there

was great interest in IBBY itself. A number of participants requested that the IBBY Australia newsletter, which has not appeared for some years, be reinstated, while others wanted to purchase IBBY publications. In every way, then, the seminar was successful and, for IBBY Australia, its reverberations might be felt for some time.

**Dr John Foster, president,  
Australian Section of IBBY**



IBBY Australia's first president, the late Ena Noël, admiring a statue of Hans Christian Andersen in Central Park, New York City



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