Translated children's books can play an important role in helping children develop an understanding of other people. Outstanding picture books in this specialized genre affirm the fact that each person is unique, but there are universal themes and feelings that every person possesses, regardless of culture or language. A comparison of 1992-1997 Caldecott Medal Award Winners and outstanding translated children's books provides insights into their similarities and differences. While the Caldecott books all seem to be big, bright, and beautiful, the translated picture books selected for study seem to be diverse in style, medium, and bookmanship. Languages, genres, and subjects common to translated children's books are also discussed. A bibliography of 54 recommended translated children's books is provided, organized by year with approximate interest level and genre listed. Each of the outstanding books listed has received at least two favorable reviews, been named as a Children's Notable Book, or received an award. (Contains 24 references.) (Author/SWC)
BEST CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS FROM ABROAD: VALUING OTHER CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

Translated children's books can play an important role in helping children develop an understanding of other people. Outstanding picture books in this specialized genre affirm the fact that each person is unique, but there are universal themes and feelings that every person possesses, regardless of culture or language. A comparison of the past six years of Caldecott Award Winners and outstanding translated children's books provides insights into their similarities and differences. While the Caldecott books all seem to be big, bright, and beautiful, the translated picture books selected for study seem to be diverse in style, medium, and bookmanship.

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature, and especially children's picture books, can be a venue for understanding and valuing our own culture and the culture of others. Valuing another culture is based on the understanding that each person is unique, but that people have universal feelings and needs that bind us together. Literature can allow for this understanding even when language is a barrier. This is accomplished through seamless translations from the original language into the language of another reader.

Translated children's books can provide the opportunity for children to read the literature from other languages and experience the common themes that tie us together; themes such as the need for friendships, love, hope, the healing aspect of humor, fear of the unknown, and the need for safety. According to Hazel Rochman (1995), children's literature can provide children with the themes that can help them move outside their own world or cross cultures. The concept of crossing cultures can be a way to value cultures, to value our likenesses and differences. Paul Hazard in his classic work, Books, Children and Men (1967/1937), wrote that children basically ignore national and man-made boundaries in their reading and develop a "universal republic of childhood." Long-time editor and Arbuthnot Award winner Margaret McElderry continues to publish translated children's books because readers will develop "...an interest in the wider world and an impetus to follow that interest throughout their lifetimes." (McElderry, 1987, p. 245). The concept of a "universality of humanity" through children reading the books of other cultures and languages has been put forward by a number of writers and researchers. (See Briley, 1991; Hearne, 1996, 1991; Jobe, 1987; McElderry, 1994; White, 1993, 1992).

However, there are barriers that even the finest translations are unable to overcome. Illustrations in children's books can provide the concrete visual experiences that can work with translations to bridge the gap between cultures. Ottinen (1993) described the process of translating children's picture books as a "many-faceted phenomenon" that includes the text as well as the illustration, but that is primarily focused on the making of a readable story. Outstanding illustrated children's books that are true to a culture, its people and heritage in both text and illustrations, and that are "readable" can help children value another culture at an early age (Diakiw, 1990). Translated children's books or international literature, as it is sometimes called, can assist children "develop a bond of shared reading experiences with children of other languages" (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1993).
The United States has a proud heritage of producing outstanding picture books. The Caldecott Award and Honor Medal Books as well as the picture books named as Notable Children's Books are evidences of that quality. Too often, however, we have excluded translated children's books from our collections and readings because we perceive that these books are different from our books or because they do not "travel well." Yet, who of us would dare suggest that the translated works of Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, or Charles Perrault, illustrated by a host of outstanding illustrators, be excluded from our children's literature. Neither in the past nor in the present do we in the U.S. have the market cornered on all of the best writers or the best illustrators in the world. And, by excluding the outstanding literature of other languages, we are saying by our actions that we do not value the literature of other languages and cultures.

How do the best translated children's picture books compare to the best picture books originally written in English and published in the United States? First, we must look at definitions of picture books and children. Picture books are unique because the content does not determine their definition, but the format is the determining factor (Cullinan & Galda, 1994). Any book of any genre can be a picture book. Whatever the content, if illustrations are equal or dominant partners with the text, the result is a picture book. Who are children? According to the American Library Association for Children, children are considered those from ages 0 through 14. This age group is used for both Batchelder and Caldecott Award consideration.

**SELECTION OF BOOKS FOR COMPARISON**

The majority of some 5000 children's books published annually by U.S. publishers are picture books (Bowker, 1996; Huck, Hepler & Hickman, 1993). According to White and Link (1997), more than 50% of the positively reviewed translated children's books published in 1996 were picture books. Homing, Kruse, and Schliesman (1995) indicated that most of the children's translations that they received for review were picture books. It is difficult to compare such small numbers of translated picture books with U.S. picture books, but the process of comparison may bring us to some interesting conclusions.

The Caldecott Award is given to the outstanding illustrated book published in the previous year. This book must be original, unique, have a unity of illustration with story, and be a book for children. As the criteria demand, each book is evaluated on the unique or exemplary use of the particular medium or media (Staerkel, Hackett, & Callaghan, 1994). The Caldecott Medal Books honored between 1992 and 1997 were selected for comparison.

The Caldecott Award is given to the outstanding illustrated book published in the previous year. This book must be original, unique, have a unity of illustration with story, and be a book for children. As the criteria demand, each book is evaluated on the unique or exemplary use of the particular medium or media (Staerkel, Hackett, & Callaghan, 1994). The Caldecott Medal Books honored between 1992 and 1997 were selected for comparison.

There is no similar picture book award for translated children's books, therefore, books selected for comparison were from among those receiving special recognition in other ways. The Batchelder Award is given annually to the publisher of the outstanding children's book translated from another language into English and published in the United States. Books of all genres, except for fairy tales, are eligible for Batchelder consideration. Picture books may be considered, but the text must be as important as the illustrations (Association for Library Service to Children Board, 1987). It becomes the responsibility of each Batchelder Award Committee to interpret this picture book rule. Three picture books have been awarded Batchelder Honor Awards within this decade. These books were included for comparison: *Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary*, (1993); *The Princess and the Kitchen* (1993); and *Star of Fear, Star of Hope* (1995).

In addition to the Batchelder Award, the Hans Christian Andersen Award is given every two years to the outstanding writer and illustrator from around the world. These persons are nominated by their national section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) for these honors (Garrett, 1994). However, other than the illustrated books by 1984 Hans Christian Andersen Award winner Mitsumasa Anno, and the 1990 winner, Lizbeth Zwerger, we see little of the other Hans Christian Andersen Award-winners' books being translated. One book illustrated by Anno (1992) *The Animals*, and one by Zwerger (1995) *Christian Morgenstern*, as well as a 1997 Children's Notable Book, *Maples in the Mist* (1996) were included in the selected translated picture books to compare as a group with the Caldecott books.
COMPARISON BETWEEN CALDECOTT AND OUTSTANDING TRANSLATED PICTURE BOOKS


When one looks at the Caldecott Medal Books between 1992-1997 as a group, one sees bold and brilliant colors and oversized illustrations; and, despite each story being unique, there seems to be a commonality among them. Perhaps it is in the total bookmanship. Five of the six illustrators used watercolor as a medium and four of the six illustrated works of realistic fiction (Association of Library Service to Children, 1996).

Batchelder Books are often thought of only as works of historical fiction in which the subject is the Holocaust and World War II. It is true that there are a number of Batchelder Award books that are works of historical fiction about these subjects. However, to lump all Batchelder and translated books into this mold provides an inaccurate view of translated children's books. The following translated children's picture books were selected for comparison and include the language, genre and artistic medium of each: 1992—The Animals: Selected Poems, translated from the Japanese, poetry in cut-paper friezes; 1993—Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary by Rian Verhoeven and Ruud van der Rol, translated from the Dutch, an information book illustrated with photographs; 1993—The Princess and the Kitchen by Annemie and Margriet Heymans, translated from the Dutch, a fantasy in colored chalk and black and white drawings; 1995—Star of Fear, Star of Hope by Jo Hoestlandt, translated from the French, historical fiction in colored chalk; 1996—Maples in the Mist translated from the Chinese, poetry in watercolor; and 1995—Christian Morgenstern: Lullabies, Lyrics and Gallows Songs, translated from the German, poetry in watercolor.

Picture books by illustrators from abroad often have a different look from the U.S. books. Because these books are from a number of countries and cultures there is more diversity in illustrations, style, and in the look of the book, or bookmanship. An identifiable look does come from the same illustrator. Just as we can identify the style of a Chris Van Allsburg or a James Stevenson book, so too can we recognize the small, detailed watercolor style of Anno or the slightly off-centered, colorful watercolor of Zwerger. At times there seems to be a surrealistic look to illustrations from abroad, at other times a gentle look and feel, but certainly not a homogenized look.

What are some of the similarities and differences between these two select groups of books—Caldecott Award winners between 1992-1997 and the selected translated children's picture books? One of the best places to go to critique books is to their intended audience, children. In 1996 each of the Caldecott books and the translated books selected for study were shared with children between the ages of five and eleven. As expected, their reactions to the Caldecott books were very positive. The big bright beautiful illustrations which blend seamlessly with the stories provide the “just right” book for check out or a read-aloud story. One second grader said, “They [the illustrations] make me seem like I am in the book; they help put pictures in my head that I make move.” However, reactions to the six translated children's books were more varied: “Wow!” “Cool!” “How sad.” “Strange!” “Where are the Spanish translations?”

Adults who compare these selections come up with some of the same conclusions. What we see in the Caldecott books are pictures that are large, bold, and colorful. As one person said, “in your face.” As a group, these books are illustrated in bold and brilliant colors, with oversized illustrations. Each is unique, and different from the ordinary picture book, yet as a group there seems to be a commonality among them. This commonality seems to say, “Made in the U.S.A!”

Librarians and teachers were asked for their impressions of a large group of translated children's books. They pointed out the odd, surrealistic style of many of the books. They also noted the wide diversity of styles ranging from the small vignette type (Andersen, Twelve Tales, 1994) to the surrealistic style (Lucht, The Red Poppy, 1995) and the unusual fonts (See Besson, October 45, 1995).
LANGUAGES, GENRES, AND SUBJECTS COMMON TO TRANSLATIONS

In order to better study and report on translated children's books, a database of translated children's books that have been reviewed in major review journals is maintained (Link & White, 1977). Reviews are obtained from Booklist, School Library Journal, Horn Book, and the The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books. These journals are some of the primary review sources used by school and public librarians in collection development (Bowker, 1996). Also, annual review sources that make it a point to review outstanding translations, such as CCBC Choices, are checked to verify if any outstanding books were missed by the other review sources. An effort is also made to read each of the translated children's books and obtain the Library of Congress MARC record. The MARC record is used to verify the language of translation, subject headings, and series title. The genre and picture book or picture storybook status is determined by reading the book. The data are entered into a computer database for greater ease and accuracy in data compilation.

Language was the first characteristic that is determined. If there is a doubt about the language or if it was unclear, the MARC record verified it in most cases. In a few instances the MARC record identified it as translated, but did not provide the original language or declared it to be "undermined." A linear look of the languages translated over a period of time can be a social, financial, and political commentary on our world. Note the decreases in a number of countries that once provided a larger number of translations. Table 1 lists the languages of translated children's books selected for study between 1992-1997.

<table>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note. Data for 1996 are incomplete as reviews for 1996 books are still being published in selected journals.
Genres of translated books receiving positive reviews in selected journals reflect some of the major genres in vogue in children's picture books published in the U.S. The most popular genres of translated books seem to be realistic fiction, fantasy, information books, and fairy and/or folklore. Picture books, which can be the format for any genre, accounted for 48% of selected translated titles between 1992 and 1996. Of the 1996 positively reviewed titles, 52% were picture books. See Table 2 for genres of translated books.

Table 2

Genres of Selected Translated Children's Books in Review Journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>19</td>
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Note. Data for 1996 are incomplete as reviews for 1996 books are still being published in selected review journals.

Subjects of translated children's books closely parallel children's books published in the U.S. The probable exceptions seem to be that more literature dealing with the subject of World War II and the Holocaust are found in translated children's books. Subject headings were taken from the annotated children's subject headings list produced by the Library of Congress and indicated in MARC records. See Table 3 for a listing of subjects of selected translated children's books.

Table 3

Subjects of Selected Translated Children's Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major Subject Headings (more than three listings)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Animals (Specific)—Fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animals—Poetry</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendship—Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noah's Ark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Biography—(Specific Person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dogs—Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairy tales/Folklore—(Specific Country)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family—Fiction
Friendship—Fiction
Holocaust Survivors—Fiction
War—Fiction
1994
Animals (Specific)—Fiction
Countries—(Specific)
Dinosaurs
Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country)
Friendship—Fiction
War—Fiction
1995
Animals (Specific)—Fiction
Art & Art-Fiction
Biography—(Specific Person)
Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country)
Family life—Fiction
Friendship—Fiction
Holocaust survivors—Fiction
Human Behaviors—Fiction
World War II—Fiction
1996*
Animals (Specific)—Fiction
Art
Artists (Specific Names)
Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country)
Jews/Holocaust

Note. Subjects for 1996 are incomplete as reviews for these books are still appearing in selected review journals and all books have not been examined.

Reviews by major review sources continue to place books in translation before children's librarians. The range of positive reviews from the selected journals ranged from 73 in 1992 to 60 in 1996. However, reviews for 1996 books are still appearing in journals, so the data for 1996 were incomplete. See Table 4 for number of positive reviews by year.

Table 4
Translated Children's books Receiving Positive Review in Selected Journals

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>34</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>60</td>
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</table>

Note. Data on 1996 translated children's books are not complete.

In order to provide the best in translated literature for children, we must be aware of some of the best translations. Sometimes these translations will provide us with a new or enriched view of peoples who
speak a other than our own. At other times we may receive an outstanding translation that does not reflect another culture. But, if it were not for the fact that it was translated and language published, English-speaking and reading children would be deprived of that book. Naomi Shihab Nye (1994) said in her introduction to *This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems From Around the World*, "Those of us living in the U.S. often suffer from a particular literary provinciality, imagining ourselves to be the primary readers and writers of the planet." As rich a heritage of children's literature as we have in the United States, it is truly a very brief history. As Nye contends, we are not the primary readers and writers of the planet. We need translations to help us value the literature and cultures of other languages.

**RECOMMENDED LIST OF TRANSLATED CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

The following outstanding books have received at least two favorable reviews, been named as a Children's Notable Books, or received an award. The bibliography is organized by year with approximate interest levels and genres listed.

**1996 Outstanding Translated Children's Picture Books**


de Beer, H. *Little Polar Bear, Take Me Home!* Illustrated by the author. Translated from the German by Rosemary Lanning. North-South, 1996. (Ages 5-8) Picture Book/Fantasy


237


Weninger, Brigitte. Ragged Bear. Illustrated by Alan Marks. Translated from the German by Marianne Martens. North-South, 1996. (Ages 4-8) Picture Book/Fantasy

Weninger, Brigitte. What Have you Done, Davy? Illustrated by Eve Tharlet. Translated from the German by Rosemary Lanning. North-South, 1996. (Ages 4-8) Picture Book/Fantasy

1995 Outstanding Translated Children's Picture Books


238
1994 Outstanding Translated Children's Picture Books


Buchholz, Quint. *Sleep Well, Little Bear*. Illustrated by the author. Translated from the German by Peter F. Neumeyer. Farrar, 1994. (Ages 5-8) Picture Book/Fantasy


1993 Outstanding Translated Children's Picture Books

Anno, Mitsumasa. *Anno's Twice Told Tales: The Fisherman and His Wife & The Four Clever Brothers by the Brothers Grimm & Mr. Fox*. Translated from the German to the Japanese to the English. Philomel, 1993. (Ages 5-9) Picture Book/Fairy and Folklore


1992 Outstanding Translated Children’s Books


Demi. *In the Eyes of the Cat.* Translated from the Japanese by Huang. Holt, 1992. (Ages 4-8) Picture Book/Poetry


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REFERENCES


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