



Alexandra Yatomi-Clarke

Found in translation

Berbay Publishing and Gecko Press have built their publishing lists by cherry-picking the best children's books from around the world, reports **Kate Blackwood**.



Julia Marshall

When Alexandra Yatomi-Clarke, managing director at Melbourne's Berbay Publishing, buys children's books from overseas, she looks for 'high-quality, eclectic books outside the mainstream offering'. Berbay, which publishes international children's books for an Australian audience, released its first titles in 2009 and will publish three new books this year. The small publisher mostly sources books from France, but this year will produce two local books using Australian authors and artists.

To choose her books, Julia Marshall, publisher at New Zealand's Gecko Press, visits the Frankfurt and Bologna book fairs each year to speak with publishers. 'I ask to only see the very best books from each publisher, and many now have a really good idea of what we are looking for: books that are strong in story, illustration and design; books that have emotion, or what we call "heart"; books we think will stand up to hundreds of re-readings,' says Marshall.

Gecko, which began in 2005 and won Best Children's Publisher of the Year in the Oceania category at this year's Bologna book fair, releases up to 15 books each year; about 80% of these are translated books from overseas—mostly from France, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Japan and German-speaking countries, as well as some from Poland and Taiwan.

Starting out

Yatomi-Clarke says she was inspired to publish international children's books after travelling in Europe with her family, where she was impressed by the 'quality, imaginative books' children were reading in places such as France and Finland. Upon her return to Australia she tried to find books with a European feel but had little success—an experience that led her to create Berbay.

Marshall recalls going to buy the rights to *Can You Whistle, Johanna?* (Ulf Stark & Anna

Höglund) and noticing that the book had been translated into 20 languages but not into English. 'I saw some stats that said that in the English market, one percent of books were in translation compared to close to forty percent in countries in Europe and in Asia. That didn't make sense to me,' says Marshall. She adds, 'When I started, the Swedish publisher of Margaret Mahy said, "Either you're an idiot or it's a brilliant niche. Let's hope it's a niche."'

Translating and editing

According to Yatomi-Clarke, translating a children's book is not as straightforward as people might think. She says it can be easy to 'lose the magic of a book' in the translation process and that she usually has to go through many drafts to address this. 'It is often painstaking getting the translation right. I try to keep the tempo and fluency of the text appealing whilst maintaining the integrity of the story.'

From the storyline to the topics covered, to the illustrations and humour, a translated foreign book will always retain its foreign 'DNA'

—Alexandra Yatomi-Clarke, Berbay Publishing

Translating picture books presents a particular challenge. 'Paragraphs are deliberately concise and punchy, so there is very little room to manoeuvre in getting the translation right. If the text is meant to rhyme, then this becomes doubly difficult. Overall, translating children's picture books can be very unforgiving,' says Yatomi-Clarke.

Yatomi-Clarke also finds that words and concepts from the original text may be confronting for an Australian audience; for example, some of Berbay's overseas books centre on complex themes such as rejection and isolation (*I Am Ivan Crocodile* by Rene Gouichoux & Julia Neuhaus) and dementia (*Angela and the Cherry Tree* by Raphael Frier & Teresa Lima). 'It is about striking the balance for an Australian market and being sensitive to the tastes and tolerances of your market.'

Marshall likens translating a picture book to translating poetry—'every word has to be exactly right'. Marshall also observes that the

editing process for a translated book is different to that for a non-translated book. 'The structure and characterisations and plot are all pretty much sorted in a translated book—we chose the book because all those things are excellent,' says Marshall. However, 'the editor of a translated book has to be very aware of voice and word usage, and the feel of the text and clumsy sentence constructions'.

There are also design elements to consider. For picture books, the cover will usually be the same, though Marshall says that Gecko will sometimes use a different typeface or even a different image. Novels, on the other hand, will generally receive new covers.

The finished product

Yatomi-Clarke says a translated book differs greatly from a non-translated one, although the difference is difficult to identify. 'From the storyline to the topics covered, to the illustrations and humour, a translated foreign book will always retain its foreign "DNA". It is akin to reinterpreting a foreign cuisine locally,' she says.

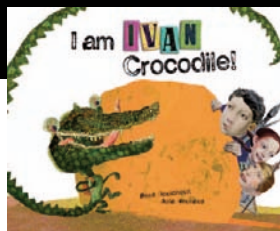
Of Gecko's translated titles, Marshall observes, 'I have asked children if they think our books come from New Zealand and they say "no". So there is obviously a difference. I am not sure what it is, but a Gecko Press book will always look completely at home in a pile of other Gecko Press books.'

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What's next?

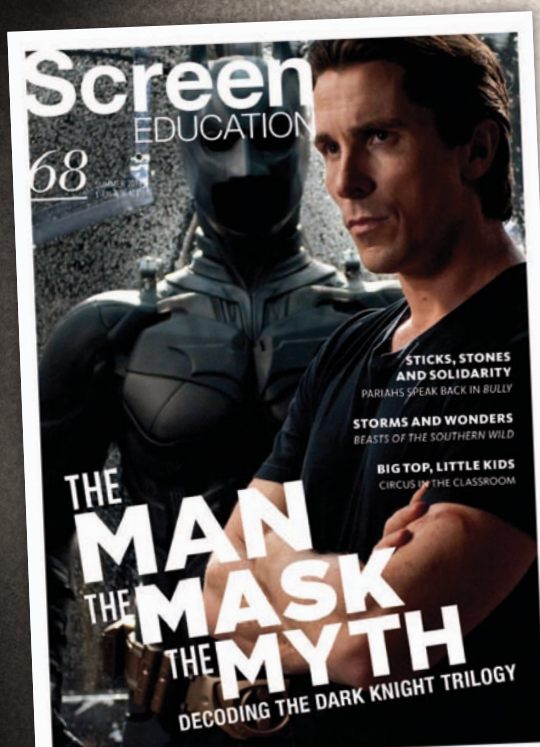
In July, Berbay is publishing *Angela and the Cherry Tree*, a book for younger readers written by Raphaele Frier, illustrated by Teresa Lima and adapted by Michael Sedunary. It tells the story of Angela, who wakes up full of hope because she is expecting a visitor, and 'gives a touching insight into the mind of a person suffering from dementia'. It is Berbay's most successful title to date, having been pre-ordered heavily by libraries.

Gecko Press has recently released a picture book for very young children called *Bang* by Belgian author Leo Timmers. It's about 'a whole lot of different car-type things that bump into each other and everything goes flying'. 'It is perfectly simple, which is something we like,' says Marshall. Its most successful international title is *Poo Bum* (Stephanie Blake), originally published in France.



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