



Picture Book People

Article Author:

[Tony Bradman](#) [1]

Article Author:

[Pat Triggs](#) [2]

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Focus on six artists and their books -**Tomie de Paola, Susanna Gretz, Celia Berridge, Colin McNaughton, Mitsumasa Anno and Peter Spier.**

Focus on six artists and their books

Six very different people, six different styles and methods of working but all, we think, worth getting to know better.

Feature compiled by **Tony Bradman** and **Pat Triggs**

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Tomie de Paola

Tomie de Paola describes himself as 'a workaholic': ten books last year. His total output is around 110 at the moment for 35-40 of which he has done text and illustration. While he's working on a book he puts in a 16 to 18-hour day, seven days a week.

But quantity doesn't rule out quality. Many of his books - like **The Clown of God, The Cat on the Dovrefell** and **The Christmas Pageant** - have won awards all over the world. In addition an American survey of children's reactions to books features several de Paola titles in the top 100 favourite books.

He was born in 1934 in Meriden, Connecticut, a small town in New England, the son of an Irish father and an Italian mother. 'I decided right from kindergarten that when I grew up I was going to write stories and draw pictures for books. I think that was because my mother read aloud to us a great deal. Books were a very important part of my childhood, and the stories she read were mostly folk tales and legends.' His Roman Catholicism was also important to him as a child, and he says 'there is a spiritual element to my work which I used to try and hide. I don't any more.'

Tomie left art school in 1956 after specialising in children's book illustration, but it wasn't until 1963 that he did his first book. After that he was, he says, 'a ten year overnight sensation. It wasn't until the early seventies that my books really began to get noticed.' **Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs** was his first book to 'really take off. In this he describes the relationship he had as a four-year-old child with his 94-year-old, Irish grandmother. It's now in its ninth printing in the United States.

'Before that book, I had been learning while I was working. Now I'm really trying to make things come more from inside myself, and I think that my autobiographical books are my best. For me a story has to ring true, and I can only really write about what I have known or felt.'

He is a great believer in 'the genre of the picture book for children', and is worried by the trend towards turning the

picture book into a 'coffee-table book for adults', something he feels is happening increasingly. 'I'm not saying that books like **Masquerade** shouldn't exist, it's just that I hate to see a book like that shove real picture books aside. After all, the picture book is all young children have got.'

He also feels that although in a picture book the pictures 'tell over half the story', the pictures should not dominate. He always writes the text first before drawing anything. 'I think for me there's a danger that if I started drawing first, the pictures would take over, and I've seen too many books from people these days who are using the children's picture book as a showcase for the artistic talent - or lack of talent as the case may be - and that's not what I want to do. I want to tell stories, particularly folk tales and legends, and I want to tell stories to children so they can understand them.'

Once the text is written. Tomie tapes it. 'I write my stories to be read aloud, and I often change the language to make sure that it reads well. Then he proceeds to the artwork, and the 18-hour days begin.

Books available in Britain include

From Methuen:

The Clown of God,

0 416 87940 3, £3.95

A retelling of an ancient legend of a little juggler and a miracle. Rich, glowing pictures.

The Christmas Pageant,

0 416 88460 1, £2.95 (Fontana Picture Lion, 0 00 661878 2, in November, no price available yet)

The nativity presented by children. Appealing small size. Useful content for schools.

The Cat on the Dovrefell,

0 416 89770 3. £3.50

An old Norwegian folk tale of a man taking a white bear to the King, involved in a plan to outwit the trolls.

The Knight and the Dragon,

0 416 89630 8, £3.75

Two characters unfamiliar with their traditional roles; but willing to have a try, with delightfully unexpected results.

Oliver Button Is a Sissy,

0 416 89650 2, £2.50 (newly published)

Oliver gets horribly teased because he prefers tap dancing to baseball and playground fights. But all ends well.

Coming soon

The Comic Adventures of Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog,

0 416 21350 2, about £3.95

and

The Prince of the Dolomites.

0 416 21430 4, about £3.95.

From The Andersen Press:

The Magic Pasta Pot,

0 09 138660 8. £2.95

A variation on the sorcerer's apprentice has the village overflowing with pasta.

Fin McCoul, The Giant of Knockmany Hill,

0 86264 00 8. £3.95 (newly published)

A version of the Irish tale in which Finn's wife saves him by outwitting the strongest giant in Ireland.

From Kestrel:

The Walking Coat,

0 7226 5723 4, £3.25, a story by Pauline Watson, illustrated by Tomie de Paola.

Susanna Gretz

Susanna Gretz was born in New York 37 years ago, grew up in New Jersey, but produced the first in what she calls her 'bear Odyssey', **Teddybears 1 to 10**, in Frankfurt, West Germany. Now she's just finished her sixth book about the bears, as well as having just begun what she describes as a 'volunteer art programme' for older kids in the area.

Volunteer work brought her to Europe straight from school, as an American Red Cross worker in 1961. She spent many years in Frankfurt and, after resigning from the Red Cross, went to art school in Offenbach. There, she began to consider doing children's picture books, and on a trip to London to do the rounds of publishers, Ernest Benn offered her her first book.

The idea for doing a book with teddybears as the main characters grew from her early experiences with publishers. 'At the time I started, I got so many rejections from publishers who said my creatures weren't sweet [enough. so](#) [4] I decided to do the bears almost out of revenge. I thought I would invent a really cuddly creature, but although they are cuddly, they're not that cuddly. I think they have a certain licence - they're not really like children, but they're not really like adults either, and that's why I think they're appealing.'

Susanna freely admits that she gets a lot of help from her publishers, and Alison Sage - her editor at Ernest Benn - in particular. 'I have thousands of ideas, but actually making a plot work is very difficult. It's a process of reducing a lot of ideas and situations to something which is much simpler, and therefore more forceful.'

'I have to believe in what the story's expressing, and a lot of that has to do with the humour of the domestic situations. If that wasn't relevant to me any more I couldn't do it.'

Susanna's latest Bears saga - **Teddybears Moving Day** - has just been published, and she is currently working on a new idea for a Bears book which will find them in a supermarket. But she has plans to branch out into other things, while still keeping the 'bears Odyssey' going.

Susanna Gretz's books are all published by Ernest Benn:

Teddybears ABC,

0 510 12418 6, £3.25 (Fontana Picture Lion. 0 00 661649 6, 85p)

Teddybears 1 to 10,

0 510 12411 9, 0.25 (Fontana Picture Lion, 0 00 660647 4, 85p)

The Bears Who Stayed Indoors.

0 510 12416 X, £3.25

The Bears Who Went to the Seaside,

0 510 12417 8-£3.25 (Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.111 8, 90p)

Teddybears Moving Day,

0 510 12402 X, about £3.95

Teddybears Cookbook, 0 510 12410 0,£3.25

Celia Berridge

'We were very poor, and not romantically so, either. I owned scarcely half a dozen books until I was a teenager, but I went to the library nearly every day and searched in vain for books about families like mine. There just weren't any.'

Celia Berridge was born in 1943, the second eldest of seven children, all of whom she describes as 'voracious readers'. But it was the experience of poverty in her childhood in Middlesex and Cardiff, and also her experiences as an inner city teacher in London, which determined how her work as a picture book author/illustrator was to develop.

Her first book - and still her favourite - was **Runaway Danny**. 'It grew out of telling a long story in serial form to a remedial class one term while I was a teacher in London. **Nippers** had just come out, and they were the only books around which depicted urban living with any semblance of accuracy, so I wrote Danny to be read by a slow-reading nine or ten-year-old.'

Celia does have a specific audience in mind for her books. 'I try to make books which will be useful to a teacher because I know that the kids I write for don't buy books or use libraries much, so they're only going to see my books in school. As far as my graphic style is concerned, I believe that kids should be able to see how the pictures are done. I don't care for these glossy-technique picture books for young children, partly because I think they're intimidating, and also because I think they're wasted on young kids. I aim for clarity and relevance. I do believe that ordinary kids have a right to see their own world- both their inner and external worlds - accurately reflected in some books.'

She has decided to give up teaching to devote more time to her work and her family - she's married and has two children, aged thirteen and nine. But she does feel increasingly torn between writing and illustrating. 'I feel a hankering to write something longer- modern fables, perhaps, the twentieth-century equivalent of folk tales. My next book - **Grandmother's Tales** - is a step in that direction.' She's also branching out into illustrating for television, with work for a new series by John Cunliffe called **Postman Pat**, to be screened this autumn on BBC TV.

'I see my job, I suppose, as being to try to produce books which, to the best of my ability, will have something in them for children. Books about children who go to boarding school or books with pictures full of antique furniture give me a rash. And I don't think it's my place to perform and show off my artistic skills at the expense of children's understanding.'

Celia Berridge's available books are all published by Andre Deutsch:

Runaway Danny,
0 233 96658 7, £3.95

On My Way to School,
0 233 96748 6, £2.95

Wet Day Witches,
0 233 96778 8, £3.50

What Did You Do in the Holidays?,
0 233 971 17 3. £3.25 (Hippo paperback, 0 590 70059 6, 95p)

Grandmother's Tales,
0 233 97357 5, about £4.25 (out in June).

Colin McNaughton

At 29, Colin McNaughton is a very busy man. To date he has published '22 or so' books, 'five or six of which are still in the publishers' pipeline'. He rents a corner of an architect's office in London near the British Museum, where he

works six and a half days a week, and he spends as much of his spare time with his French wife and two children aged four and 18 months as he can.

He was born in Newcastle and, despite many years of living in London, still has a noticeable Geordie accent. He came south straight from school to go to the Central School of Art and went on to the Royal College to specialise in illustration. Midway through his three years there his work was noticed. The result was two books for Ernest Benn and one for Heinemann before he left college, and he hasn't looked back.

Colin read very few books as a child. 'The **Beano** and **Dandy** annuals were about the height of my reading, but that wasn't through choice. Up there working-class kids weren't - and still aren't - bought books other than annuals at Christmas.'

When he starts a new picture book, he writes a 'scenario' first, then draws the story in pictures. 'Writing a picture book text I find very difficult, because after all, it is about the pictures. You don't want to say in the text what you can see in the pictures, that's saying things twice. You've got to get the right balance, the right feeling. I write it, my editors re-write it, and I'll re-write their re-writes until we feel it's right.'

He thinks that his graphic style is becoming 'looser, definitely. It's not that I spend less time on it, it's just that my confidence has increased and I can get on with it. What's more important - and this is something I've always known - is the actual content of the book. It doesn't matter how marvellous your technique is, if the content is empty or thin the work isn't going to be strong. And that's what I'm doing now - concentrating much more on the quality of the content.

He feels that having children of his own has also helped to improve his work. 'I've learnt about the little things of childhood, like what a child wrapped up in a large bath towel looks like, and things I never knew or forgot about my own childhood. The details I'm seeing in my own children are helping to enrich my work, they're making it more solid, more full. less based on comic cliches and humorous situations.'

Ernest Benn and Heinemann are still Colin McNaughton's main publishers.

From Benn:

Colin McNaughton's ABC and 123,

0 385 13273 5. £2.75

The Rat Race,

0 510 22513 6. £3.25 (also available in Picture Puffin. 0 14 050.311 0. 80p)

The amazing adventures of Anton B. Stanton, a boy only as big as a teacup. Lively and inventive.

The Pirats,

0 510 00053 3. £3.50

Anton again, rescuing the King water rat's daughter from the marauding pirats.

Forthcoming are

Fat Pig,

0 510 00036 3. about £1.50

and later in the year

If Dinosaurs Were Cats and Dogs,

0 510 001 16 5. £4.75

From Heinemann:

Walk Rabbit Walk,

0 434 94988 4, £2.90

The Great Zoo Escape,

0 434 94989 2. £2.90

Football Crazy,

0 434 94991 4, £4.95

(which should be issued as a Piccolo picture book in the spring of next year)

Newly arrived Bruno wins his place (and some friends) in Tex's Tigers five-a-side team. Bags of comic strip-type action - the pictures do everything but move, and they come pretty close to that.

King Nonn the Wiser,

0 434 94990 6. £4.50

(just out) Book-loving, peaceful King Nonn manages to fulfil all his subjects' demands for traditional kingly behaviour by being willing and shortsighted. Good jokes in words and pictures.

Mitsumasa Anno

Mitsumasa Anno was lucky enough to be born in a small town in western Japan called Tsuwano, in 1926, where his parents ran an inn. Lucky, as he sees it, because being born there at that time gave him a childhood in a beautiful, unspoilt valley surrounded by mountains, which he didn't leave for the first time until he was ten years old.

Now he is deeply pessimistic about the future of his country, which is the most heavily industrialised and most crowded nation on Earth. The beautiful countryside of his childhood now lies under acres of barren concrete, as 'modern civilisation' spreads out like a polluting disease. Anno thinks it also pollutes minds, and particularly young minds, and points to the fact that suicide in the under-18 age group is reaching nightmare proportions, with an estimated 900 to 1000 children taking their own lives a year. This he relates not only to the pressures of an education system which is probably one of the most competitive in the world, but also to the lack of creativity in the teaching.

'If teachers are not creative, then they can't bring out creativity in their pupils. A person who knows the names of many flowers may know nothing of the flowers themselves.' And coming from a country where there is almost no real countryside left, he says that 'human beings can't do without nature. No human being can really live without earth and grass and sky.'

Anno was himself a primary schoolteacher for ten years before going on to teach art at college level. A publisher saw his work while he was teaching, and so he began a career as an author/illustrator of children's books in 'middle age'. Today he is Japan's top picture book artist, and his books have appeal for all age ranges. A visit to Europe 20 years ago, inspired by the stories of Hans Christian Andersen, has led him to translate his own childhood from Japanese to European countryside, as in **Anno's Counting Book** and **Anno's Italy**. His work covers a very wide range, from his intricate, Escher-like **Alphabet** to the straight-forward picture book like **The King's Flower**.

To a certain extent his pessimism for the future has deepened after seeing the spread of the industrial blight in the landscape of Europe over the last few years. He feels there is nothing he can do to give back to children the beauty that has been lost: 'Except in my books.'

Nine of Anno's books are currently available, all from The Bodley Head, including **Anno's Counting Book**, 0 370 30009 2, £3.50, and **The King's Flower**, 0 370 30182 X, £3.95. His latest book is **Anno's Magical ABC**, 0 370 30405 5, £5.95, which he has done with his son, Masaichiro. It's an anamorphic alphabet, in which the pictures are distorted on the page, and can only be seen properly by using the silver-paper mirror provided with the book.

Peter Spier

Peter Spier and his wife and two children now live in Long Island, near New York, but he was born in 1927 in Holland.

His father was an illustrator and journalist, and Peter says: 'I can't remember a time when I didn't dabble with clay, draw, or watch someone draw. My father worked at home, and I grew up with it all.'

When he was 18, Peter went to art school in Amsterdam. In 1951, the Spier family decided to move to the United States, and settled in Houston. From there Peter moved on to New York where he began to work as an illustrator, and eventually began doing his own books.

He is a meticulous craftsman who goes out to make hundreds of sketches of countryside, people or buildings before he tackles a book. He also says that all his books have very specific settings, and that the greatest compliment for him is when someone says 'I come from the area you used in one of your books and I know exactly where you stood for that drawing.' He doesn't like to disillusion them. 'They don't, of course. The pictures are always composites of various things.'

He's fairly hard-headed about what he does. 'I like doing picture books, and that's why I do them. They have a much longer selling life than an average novel - I hope my books will still be selling in 20 or 30 years' time. But I only promote an idea if I think it will sell, and I try to do a little market research beforehand on the current popular themes.'

This is evident from the fact that many of his books are now designed as co-editions. His latest book **People** was published in 39 languages, and was almost a runaway best-seller before it reached the shops.

He likes to be involved in every aspect of his books, right down to the production. He chooses the typeface himself, and pastes up the books to his own design. And although he works at producing what he thinks the 'market' wants, he's also clear about who he's really doing it for.

'In the end, if a child doesn't like it, it's dead, although adults are responsible for publishing and buying it. So justice is done.'

Many of Peter Spier's books have won awards like the Caldecott Medal. Fifteen are available in this country from World's Work. The latest are

Bored - Nothing to Do,

0 437 76513 X, £3.10

The Great Flood,

0 437 76512 1, £3.50

Nothing Like a Fresh Coat of Paint,

0 437 76515 6, £3.95

People, 0 437 76516 4, £4.95.

Puffin publish a story by Phyllis Krasilovsky, **The Cow Who Fell in the Canal**, 0 14 050 034 0, 80p, illustrated by Peter Spier, and have just issued **The Fox Went Out On a Chilly Night**, an old song illustrated by Peter Spier, 0 14 050.304 8, 90p.

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