



# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIANNE DUBUC

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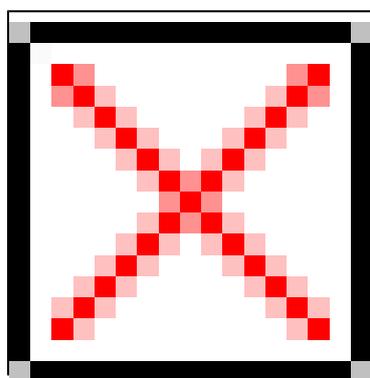
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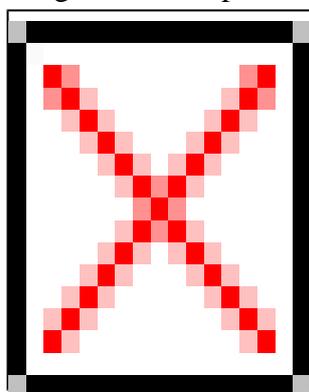
An interview with the award-winning author of **The Lion and the Bird**



French-Canadian Marianne Dubuc is an international award-winning illustrator and writer of books for children of all ages. In 2014, Marianne won Canada's Governor General Award for outstanding illustrations with [The Lion and the Bird](#) [3]. While Marianne was on a recent visit to the UK for [The Children's Bookshow](#) [4] [Ferelith Hordon](#) interviewed her for **Books for Keeps**.

It is always exciting to meet an author or illustrator; even more so when they arrive from another country. So it was a great pleasure to be given the opportunity to talk to the award-winning Canadian illustrator, Marianne Dubuc. Up until now her work has not been easily available in this country, but this is about to change

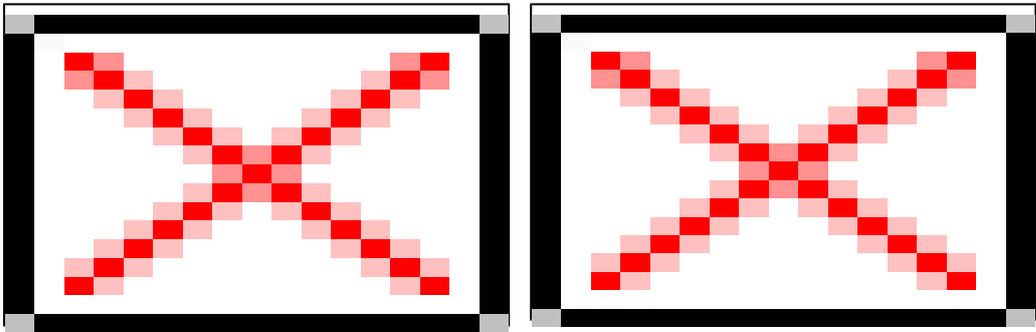
Watching her drawing while she spoke, I wanted to know how she had started as an illustrator, had she always wanted to



be an artist. Not consciously, 'I have always drawn a lot. As a little girl, an only child, my parents would always take me everywhere with them to their adult parties and I would keep busy drawing.' Her father was a sound artist for films and travelled a great deal. She and her mother followed him until her schooling began at 5 years old. Looking at [Here comes Mr Postmouse](#) [5] I am struck by the way the visual narrative has a strong cinematic feel, the illustrations moving across the page just as a film would move across a screen. Has film influenced her art? Marianne feels that there are two reasons for this: 'The way I create my stories is through images first. I see the images in my head, and the stories develop from there, I don't create the story with the words. This was particularly the case with [The Lion and the Bird](#) [3]. I intentionally created the book images first, with the intention of adding the text

afterwards. It's my preferred way of working?. She also confesses that as an only child who was always drawing and making things, she was allowed to watch as much television as she liked: 'I guess TV influenced me a lot.'

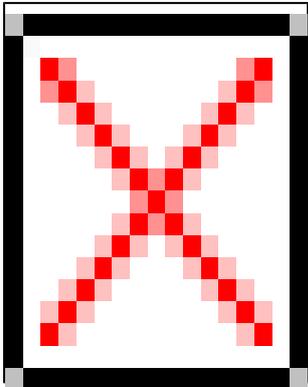
Perhaps arising from this background and reflecting her way of working with images, her first book, **The Sea**, was a wordless picture book. This is a format that is still not usual in this country. Is it different in Quebec, Marianne's home? Certainly the market there is much more akin to that of France with an acceptance of the quirky, but even in Quebec the wordless picture book is not common. 'People seem to be afraid of them; they find them too complicated or hard?', she comments, 'For me it is actually easy. You just take a book and do what you want with it. I am happy if someone takes my book and changes the whole story?.'



Sadly **The Sea** is not yet available in the UK but we do have **Here comes Mr Postmouse** and [The Lion and the Bird](#) [3], both translated from the French and published by [Book Island](#) [6]. While there are similarities between the two books, they are very different. **Here Comes Mr Postmouse** is a 'busy' book, reminiscent of Richard Scarry. The reader is invited to join Mr Postmouse as he delivers the letters, exploring the details of each spread, delighting in discoveries. I admitted to having spent a great deal of time ensuring the number of parcels on the little cart was correct for each stage! But Marianne admits cheerfully that she actually did make a mistake; one that was quickly noted by an eagle-eyed child who spotted that there were too few plates for the Rabbit Family. She has since changed the illustration and is unabashed 'I find it fun that there are mistakes!'

She likes to include things children can discover and, perhaps, recognise - she cites the inclusion of Little Red Riding Hood who makes a discreet appearance among the characters met by Mr Postmouse - though Marianne is happy that for some readers this will just be a little girl in a red cloak hiding behind a tree.

Both narratives use animals as characters. She enjoys drawing animals, but it also allows her greater freedom to tell her story because she can play upon their accepted characteristics. She also feels that children can readily identify with animals. Indeed looking back at her childhood reading, her favourites all starred animal characters.



Neither **The Lion and the Bird** or **Here Comes Mr Postmouse** are wordless. What are the steps she takes to move from the images to text? Very early Marianne realised that to clarify her thoughts and to get an idea she has to have a discussion: 'I talk with the paper?'. This creates a storyline which first becomes the images. The text then follows quite precisely. Here, indeed, the texts of these two books reflect this process. For **The Lion and the Bird** inviting empathy and thought, it takes the form of a dialogue between the two characters. In **Here Comes Mr Postmouse** the text is more of a guideline for the adult reading the book, though quite dispensable: 'Often the kids are almost immediately shouting out what they are seeing. They won't be listening to the words, they are just a line to get

you from page eight to the end.?

Emerging clearly from our conversation is the sense that for Marianne, the book is not an object to be picked up and put down, but is a container for a story. Through the story she invites the young reader to respond individually so her narratives have spaces; indeed there may even be blank spreads as in **The Lion and the Bird**. This was not consciously planned: ?This book came together very quickly. The blank pages are part of the rhythm of the book. It was how the book worked.?

These are books that work, crossing boundaries with ease. We look forward to welcoming more from the creative vision of Marianne Dubuc.

**[The Lion and The Bird](#)** [3] and **[Here Comes Mr Postmouse](#)** [5] are published by **[Book Island](#)** [6].

**Ferelith Hordon** is active member of **CILIP YLG** and has served as Chair of both YLG London and of the National Committee. She is editor of **Books for Keeps** and of **IBBYLink**, the online journal of **IBBY UK**

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[4] <http://www.thechildrensbookshow.com>

[5] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk-www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/here-comes-mr-postmouse>

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