**Under strict embargo until 00:01 on Thursday 9 May**

**Jan Pieńkowski honoured with BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award**

  
Jan Pieńkowski at his home in London. Photo credit David Bebber

Thursday 9May 2019 - Jan Pieńkowski, the award-winning Polish-born author and illustrator, famous for his iconic Meg and Mog books, has been awarded the 2019 BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award.

The [BookTrust Lifetime Achievement](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/lifetime-achievement-award) Award celebrates the body of work of an author or illustrator who has made an outstanding contribution to children's literature. The award has been running since 2015 to recognise an author or illustrator's lifetime of work. Previous winners include Shirley Hughes, Judith Kerr, Raymond Briggs, Helen Oxenbury and the late John Burningham, who were awarded the first ever double prize in 2018.

Jan, aged 82, was born in Poland in 1936 and spent his early years there and in Bavaria, Vienna and Italy before arriving in England at 10 years old.

Jan is renowned for being one of the greatest innovators in book illustration, particularly for his signature silhouette cut out illustrations and his pioneering pop ups. His books tred the perfectly fine line between being slightly frightening but also humorous and fun. Jan says: “It’s ok to have scary books, as long as you’re tucked up in bed, because it’s a safe distance.”

Jan credits his country of birth as one of his main influences. A lot of his work can be traced back to traditional folklore, including the Slavic witch Baba Jaga, who Jan cites as the likely inspiration for his character Meg. His recent book *The Glass Mountain – Tales from Poland* written by David Walser is illustrated entirely in traditional Polish style with scissor-cut paper, echoing stories told him as a young boy in war-time Poland. He is also recognised as one of the pioneers of the pop-up book, in particular the picture book the *Haunted House,* for which he holds a second prestigious Kate Greenaway Medal. This was the book that brought back the art of paper engineering and led to a worldwide craze for pop-up books. Jan was awarded his first Kate Greenaway Medal for his silhouette illustrations in Joan Aiken's *The Kingdom Under the Sea*.

Pieńkowski now has over 150 books to his name, including his most prolific artwork for the Meg & Mog series, written by Helen Nicoll (till her death in 2012) and David Walser.

Jan says his fondest memory is of his mother reading to him when he was four years old, often after lunchtime when they were relaxing in a hammock. On discussing the importance of children’s books, Jan observes “it’s their first experience of culture and it helps to open their minds. It can be incredibly influential in the early years and gives them building blocks to make sense of the world.”

**Jan’s partner and collaborator author David Walser said of Jan being recognised for a lifetime of achievement:** “I think it’s wonderful that Jan has won the BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award. He’s an exceptional children’s artist and writer and he’s given a huge number of children a lot of pleasure and perhaps it will go on after we’re all dead. I’m so glad this recognition has come in time.”

The judges for the 2019 BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award are children’s picture book writer, Smriti Prasadam Halls, journalist Lucy Mangan, writer SF Said, author and illustrator Ed Vere, and journalist, critic and chair of the panel, Nicolette Jones.

**Diana Gerald, CEO, BookTrust said:** “A very well-deserved win for an incredible lifetime of work. Jan Pieńkowski has been hugely influential in the children’s books world and continues to delight and entertain children to this day. We’re honoured to award Jan with the 2019 BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award.”

**Nicolette Jones, Chair of 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award said:** “Jan Pieńkowski’s romantic and detailed silhouettes, which hark back as far as Asian shadow puppets, via the work of animator Lotte Reineger in the 1930s, have brought magic to children’s illustration, and enable all children to identify with his characters. Not only has he been distinctive for this lovely tracery, but he has also been a pioneer of the pop-up book, and in his simply designed depictions of Meg and Mog has created an iconic picture book series.  I am delighted that this Lifetime Achievement Award has gone to Polish-born Pieńkowski, whose 140 books have made a huge contribution to children’s art and literature in Britain.”

**Francesca Dow, Managing Director, Penguin Random House Children’s said:** “We could not be more delighted to see Jan honoured in this way for a lifetime of incredible creativity. From innovating pop-ups, to creating well-loved characters, to the most intricate paper-cut illustrations inspired by Polish folk art from his homeland, Jan’s is a career which has brought wonder and pleasure and beauty to so many lives.  *Meg and Mog*, for me, encapsulates childhood – noises, surprises, fun and love rolled into a simple read-aloud exuberant book (or books, luckily for us!). We are very proud to have just published in March Jan’s latest picture book, written by David Walser, *The Odyssey*, and prouder still to have been part of his publishing journey for so long. Heartfelt congratulations to a very special creator and person.”

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**Notes to Editors**

A full interview with Jan Pieńkowski, his partner David Walser and journalist and long-time friend, Nick Tucker, is published on the BookTrust website. Click here to read the full interview. [www.booktrust.org.uk/jan-pienkowski-interview](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/jan-pienkowski-interview)

Additional quotes about Jan from his peers

**SF Said, Judge for 2019 BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award judge** “In the course of a career spanning half a century, Jan Pieńkowski has made extraordinary contributions to children's literature. His work formed a major part of my own childhood, and books such as Meg and Mog have shaped so many generations now that they have become part of the fabric of British childhood and culture in general. His work is notable for its vibrant originality and inventiveness, passionate devotion to craft, and perhaps above all for the seriousness with which he has always taken his audience. Pieńkowski has produced unique art objects and narratives of lasting value for readers of all ages, enriching our imaginations and our lives, and he is a very worthy winner of the BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award.”

**Ed Vere, Author, illustrator and 2019 BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award judge** “Loved by generations of children and their parents, Jan Pieńkowski’s books are consistently pioneering, intelligent, beautifully considered, and always created with a mischievous sense of fun.  
Jan has lived an inspiring life dedicated to making books of the very highest standard. From the Fairy Tale silhouettes inspired by his Polish upbringing, to the complex pop-ups of Haunted House, to the pure line work of Meg and Mog; these are beautifully designed books which give full credit to a child’s intelligence - and understand implicitly how to communicate their story through the pictures. And what beautiful pictures they are… A trove of delights for children to discover!  
This award is very well deserved.”

**Smriti Prasadam-Halls, children’s book writer and 2019 BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award judge** “Jan Pieńkowski is an artist of rare and breath-taking brilliance. His work makes my heart ache. His graceful figures dance their stories across the page, silhouetted against a backdrop of exquisite, spectacular colour. Inked in black, they are utterly universal. They are each of us. All of us. When I open one of Jan’s books, I belong to the oldest, most wonderful stories ever told. And within the mysterious filigree magic that he weaves, there is longing, menace, radiance, melancholy, joy and always, always, unspeakable beauty. We are all invited to see ourselves here.”

**Lucy Mangan, journalist, writer and 2019 BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award judge** “I couldn't be happier that Jan is the recipient of this year's Lifetime Achievement Award from BookTrust - to have had a hand in it feels like some small measure of repayment for all the joy his books and his artistry have given me over the years."

**Michael Morpurgo, Author and BookTrust President** “I have been a huge admirer of Jan’s work all my adult life. As father, grandfather, great grandfather, as storyteller and teacher, I have had a lifetime of joy with his books. He has had a profound effect on the lives of millions of children, conjuring up images that capture stories, that captivate readers, young and old alike, and are never forgotten. He opens hearts and minds, reaches the child in all of us, the important part.

Bravo Jan! And, thank you from me, from us, from all the millions who love your books.”

**Lauren Child, Waterstones Children’s Laureate 2017-2019** “I have admired Jan’s distinctive and beautiful illustrations since I was a child – from the joyful pen and ink drawings depicting the wonderful Meg and Mog, to the exquisitely detailed paper-cuts for his series of fairytales.  Most of all I love the work he created for his series of pop-up books, books I saved up for and treasured. The Haunted House and Little Monsters were both very influential in waking me up to the idea of illustration as a career – they were just such exciting and vibrant books, completely different from anything I had seen before.  Jan so deserves to be recognised as an illustrator of huge importance and I couldn’t be more delighted that he is being honoured with the Book Trust Lifetime Achievement award.”

**Chris Riddell, Author, illustrator and BookTrust Ambassador** “Jan Pieńkowski is a visual magician and one of our greatest illustrators. His work bewitches, enchants and holds me spellbound.”

**Laura Dockrill, author and poet** “Jan Pieńkowski is a hero of my childhood. He is up there with Dahl, Disney and coco pops. His work has a certain quality to them, a mood, a feeling- an experience. The pages come with vivid memories so potent you can almost taste them. They are trips. They are books that you fall into. That stay with you. That take you places.”

**James Mayhew, author and illustrator** “Jan Pieńkowski contribution to books is simply legendary. One of the greatest innovators in book illustration, from astonishing pop-ups to rhapsodic marbling and dazzlingly intricate silhouettes, his work has been hugely influential on other illustrators and has brought joy, enchantment, magic and delight to generations of children. He is truly one of the greats, loved and admired and respected by his peers and adored by book lovers. I cannot think of a more worthy recipient for this greatly deserved award.”

**Helen Oxenbury,** **author and illustrator** “Before publishers had special departments for Children’s Books, before Children’s books were considered money makers, before Art directors for Children’s books were even thought of, John Burningham and I would go to Jan to art direct our new books and design the covers. Jan’s sense of design was extraordinary. Eventually this special talent extended to the creation of a Greeting Card Company called Gallery 5, which revolutionised greeting cards. You would never find kittens in baskets or lurid red roses in the Gallery 5 range. He then turned to Children’s books.  This time his flair for design was complemented by a wonderful sense of colour.  The Meg and Mog books that he created with Helen Nicoll are splendid examples, and they were much loved by my children when they were young.  Humour was a great part of his books.  He went on to produce hilarious Pop ups and many more books, each generating delight and wonder for a whole generation of children. I’m so grateful to dear Jan, not only for sharing his talent with us, but for his long and unwavering friendship.

I can’t think of anyone who deserves this award more than Jan.”

**BookTrust** is dedicated to getting children reading because we know that children who read are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative. Their early language development is supported and they also do better at school.

We are the UK’s largest children’s reading charity; each year we reach 3.4 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading, because we know that reading can transform lives.

We work with a variety of partners to get children excited about books, rhymes and stories, because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. Our books are delivered via health, library, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit**.** [**booktrust.org.uk**](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)