



## THE ASTRID LINDGREN MEMORIAL AWARD

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### Award Lecture by Sonya Hartnett Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award Recipient 2008

Might I begin by saying what a pleasure it is to be here in Stockholm, this city of water and light, and thank you for having myself, my sister Olivia, and my publisher Laura Harris as guests in your country. More than that, thank you for being a nation of such culture that you would fund such a prize as the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. I am an Australian, and, in Australia, books are not valued particularly highly; so I congratulate you for looking, through this prize, into the future, for appreciating the past, and for acknowledging what is so rarely acknowledged: that children's books help shape children, and thus, in a small but important way, shape the world. Thank you for valuing the work of all those who write, illustrate, and promote books for the young. Thank you, too, for being open-minded enough to make the Award an international prize, a move that seems amazingly generous to every foreign writer and illustrator.

#### **Why isn't Australia making that film?**

You don't think need me to tell you that your financial and intellectual generosity is remarkable, and the whole world knows it, and every other country feels craven in the knowledge that they themselves aren't so liberal-minded. At home, a few weeks ago, a woman asked me why I had a Swedish film crew following me around: when I replied that they were making a documentary about Australian children's literature, she frowned and said, 'Why isn't *Australia* making that film?' And because I did not have time to climb onto my hobby-horse topic of how poorly Australia treats those who write for her children, I replied, 'Because Sweden is *better* than Australia.' Because that's what the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award does: it shows the world that you are a better country than most.

### **Happiest pottering around the house by myself**

I was born in Melbourne, the mainland's southernmost city, in 1968. This year I turned forty, which was a shock to someone who has, career-wise, made so much out of being young. I was the second of what was to be six children, and we lived with our parents in a three-bedroom house in Box Hill, a suburb that was not prosperous; but our house was surrounded by untamed land where a creek ran, and goats and horses grazed. My brothers and sisters were outgoing and adventurous children, given to jumping off the roof and visiting friends and enjoying school. I shared little of this Famous Five spirit, and was happiest pottering around the house by myself, spending my weekends prowling the creek-land, patting the horses, riding my bike, and tending to the cats and mice and budgerigars that were all Mum allowed me to keep; I had to wait until I was sixteen before she let me get the dog for which I begged for years.

Dogs would become an important element in many of the books I went on to write, and dogs have been the great friends of my life, as have all the animals I have kept and watched and learned from. The countless hours I spent roaming the creek, first alone, then later with my first dog, Zak, taught my mind to really experience what surrounded me: to hear the wind, smell the leaves, feel the earth under my feet. I loved my neighbourhood, the scrubby miles of parkland and the big weatherboard houses that lined the streets; thirty years later, I still feel most confident of my literary surrounds when I set a novel in the suburban streets of Melbourne.

### **Doubtful of my ability and afraid of the teachers**

It was through these streets I used to ride my bike to visit my grandmother Bon: Bon's house, and Bon herself, later became the models for Beattie and Beattie's home in *What The Bird's See*. At my childish insistence, and although I could hardly understand a word, she used to read *Desiderata* to me. *With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.* Though a child, I was keenly aware that the world was no joyful place: at school I was miserable and lonely, doubtful of my ability and afraid of the teachers, who were Carmelite nuns brought out from India, none of whom were qualified to teach, all of whom seemed to hate children passionately.

I lived for the weekends and the Christmas holidays, when Mum would pack us in the car and drive for four or five days until we reached Goondiwindi, a hot boarder town in Queensland, an annual journey that covered thousands of kilometres of outback, a hot and cramped but fabulous journey.

### **I borrowed books based on the beauty of their covers**

Besides animals and school holidays, there were two other things I liked: art, and books. Art – by which I mean drawing and cutting and pasting, a pursuit at which I could while away hours and one which, I think, has contributed to my writing by refining my eye for the visual – art was easy, because paper and pencils are cheap to come by; books, however, were rare jewels in our house.

We had no money for luxuries, which books certainly were: new novels arrived in the house only on the occasions of birthdays, which were not unbearably uncommon, given that there were six of us. I used to save my pocket money to buy Enid Blyton's stories, which I loved, and which taught me what books are supposed to do – that is, they are supposed to take a child away from noisy siblings and arguing parents and mashed potatoes for dinner - but my pocket money was only five cents a week, and a Blyton cost 70 cents, so I could only afford one or two a year.

Back in the 1970s, there was none of the cult of the author than exists now, and aside from Enid Blyton I was familiar with few of the names of those writing for children, even those who wrote the books I actually read; nor was I particularly interested in knowing them. I read the books that Mum chose as our birthday gifts, and I don't know what made her choose the ones she did; in the library, I borrowed books based on the beauty of their covers and the featuring of animals or little girls in their blurbs.

### **Only a child can be jealous of a fictional character**

It was around this time, and because of her being a little girl who owned animals, that I read *Pippi Longstocking*: I remember liking Pippi, who was as free as I'd like to have been, but not liking her too much, because she had a horse and a monkey. Only a child can be jealous of a fictional character, but it is due to such emotional investments that a book remains memorable to the adult that the child grows to be.

And that, then, was my life: liking to read, liking animals, liking to be by myself. I was meek and runty, and felt safest when unnoticed. I had no ambition to be anything when I grew up. I had no imagination with which to look into the future. I had no confidence that I was capable of doing anything worthwhile, and I did not believe myself to be an interesting or likeable person.

### **A fondness for detail**

I was also, at 9 years old, a remarkably hopeless student in every subject except art, a distressing situation which improved the day my Grade 5 teacher, Sister Thelma, told the class to write, as homework, a made-up story. I had never before done anything of the kind before, and largely lacked the nous to understand that behind every book I'd ever read was a real person responsible for the words. Nonetheless I did my homework, as I always conscientiously did my homework.

Showing an instant leaning toward the bleakness that has characterised my work ever since, I wrote a story about a girl who fell off a cliff and landed on a ledge, breaking a leg and condemning herself to a painful and lingering death. Even then, I had a fondness for detail – I remember including a line of ants that trooped past the girl's blackening foot. The writing of that story was, in retrospect, the single most influential act of my life in so many ways, not least because I realised, as I wrote it, that the writer is a god.

### **I could create a universe out of nothing**

At the helm of a story, I was no longer a shy child flailing in a world that seemed impossibly complicated: instead, words gave me the power to open a door on a world where everything is bendable to the creator's will. The snivelling child that I was had finally found something I could do.

I couldn't run, I couldn't do maths, I couldn't keep a best friend – but I could create a universe out of nothing, and when Sister Thelma read the story out in class, my future was sealed - although I didn't know it then, and when I did know it, years later, I fought against it, because I never *wanted* to be a writer the way I hear of so many people wanting to be writers, I never strove for it or consciously decided that's what I intended to become.

I wrote because I loved to do it, but I didn't ever think it would become my life, perhaps because a Catholic education had taught me that I'd never achieve anything, and that what I did achieve wouldn't be any good.

More than that, people like me simply did not become authors. Enid Blyton was an author: I was a scrubby suburban kid. I was then, and I remain now, nothing special, with none of the wisdom that a writer seems to be expected to have, and nothing of particular importance to say. So my

work has been a constant puzzle to me: every day I wonder, *Why me? How did this happen?* It's incredible to me that I have lived this fortunate life which I never imagined for myself.

### **Disheartening disappointments and unexpected successes**

Through the rollercoaster ride of the past 25 years of writing, through the disheartening disappointments and unexpected successes of an accidental career, I have often felt less like a real person and more like a character in a book, propelled about by the whims of another, someone who has plans for me other than the ones I have for myself.

And if I feel like a character in a novel, it is to the novels that I have given my life, mining everything I have ever felt and seen and known and heard and lost and won and loved and disliked in order to enrich and make real the work. I have forsaken things for the books, important things like a partner and children, because there is no emotional space left over for things like that when the work wants everything from you. I am a writer by accident, but after 25 years a writer is, now, all that I am.

### **I was free to write as I pleased**

But when I was nine, I wasn't troubled by such esoteric concerns. With no plans to become a writer, I was free to write as I pleased. I filled notebook after notebook with extravagant tales of kidnapped children, wild horses, and, in one vast stretching of my feeble abilities, a long-winded account of the invasion of Australia by killer ants, which coincidentally was to actually happen in Queensland many years later.

The notebook novels were often illustrated, and in keeping with my immediate affinity for the gruesome, the illustrations were sometimes decorated with my own blood. At the same time, I was leaving my childhood and Enid Blyton behind, and moving onto being a teenager, reading American writers like Robert Cormier and, in particular, S E Hinton, whose work I admired and who taught me something else that was important about books: that is, that a real-life girl of a certain age can fall in love with a make-believe boy.

Hinton's books were full of anguished young men, and I read her stories as much for the pleasure of their company as for their thrilling plots. Entering my teens, I was plain and doltish, and knew no actual boy would ever like me: but I could, I realised, invent on paper young men who, were they real, would certainly be in love with me.

Since that time, I have invented dozens of handsome young fellows, my work is littered with them, they are all supernaturally graceful and beautiful, and some of them are not fit for human relationships and would, were they real, be locked away - but they all have their origins in a 13 year-old's desire to be liked by a boy. In this quest for love, I turned my back on killer bees and wrote a story called, rather awfully, *Trouble All the Way*, in which the main characters were two 14 year olds, Max and Tim.

### **I wanted to read about a place that I knew**

Suzy Hinton's American landscapes had made me conscious of the fact that most books weren't set in Australia, and for a long time I assumed this was because an Australian setting wasn't somehow good enough to support a novel. There were very few Australian writers for young people and even for children around the time I'm speaking of, the early 80s. But, having created them, I didn't want beautiful Tim and beautiful Max to live in America, far away from me. And although I loved Hinton's urban badlands, I wanted to read about a place that I knew, and that my friends and siblings knew.

I set *Trouble All the Way* in the Melbourne streets that were so familiar to me, and had the characters do the kind of things myself and my friends did – go to school, go to the movies, fight with their sisters, be tormented by their parents. It was the first time I'd written about a physical and emotional landscape that I truly knew, and I remember the sense of certainty this brought to what I wrote.

*Trouble All the Way* was better than its predecessors, so much so that I typed it up on a little typewriter using paper my dad brought home from his friend's caryard, every page of which had SWANKIE'S CAR YARD emblazoned across the top. Despite this special treatment, the novel shared its predecessors' fate: it was thrown under my bed and virtually forgotten about. It wasn't until a friend asked to read the manuscript, and then suggested that I send it to a publisher, that a light shone dimly in my mind.

### **I was 14, and one is brave at 14**

Of course, I did not think that a publisher would accept the story. I did not think that any of the things that have happened over the past 25 years could happen. But I was 14, and one is brave at 14, perhaps because one is innocently ignorant of how easily hearts can shatter. I remember

my friend saying, 'You've got nothing to lose', and believing she was right, because I did not know how terribly much I stood, at that moment, to win or lose.

I looked up P for Publishers in the telephone directory, and posted the manuscript – by now splattered with bolognise sauce and singed after being tossed into a fire, and still sporting the words SWANKIE'S CAR YARD across the top of every page - to a publisher that had an office reasonably close to my house. Rigby was an educational publisher, but I did not know if that mattered. It couldn't be allowed to matter, because the fact was I hadn't the money to buy the stamps necessary to send the work further afield.

### **Explore the taut relationships that exist within families**

*Trouble All the Way* and *Sparkle and Nightflower*, the book I wrote after Rigby made the startling decision to publish *Trouble All the Way* in 1984, the year I was 15, display many of the characteristics upon which my work has been built ever since. *Sparkle and Nightflower* is set in the countryside, the one landscape beside the suburbs that I know well, and most of my books are still set in one or the other of these, with only a couple of exceptions, *Wilful Blue* and *The Ghost's Child*, going down to the untamed sea, that most glorious of settings, but also the one with which I empathise the least, and the most difficult to replicate on paper.

The lead characters in both *Trouble All the Way* and *Sparkle and Nightflower* are diffident and troubled young men, early versions of Jordan Willow and Kitten Latch and Indigo Kesby and Gabriel and Finnigan, and many more of that gang; and both novels explore the taut relationships that exist within families and groups of friends, which remain the kind of high-pressure entanglements I like to explore. *Trouble All the Way* is clearly set in the early 1980s – the characters play Space Invaders and see 'Star Wars' at the cinema - but having watched that novel grow more dated with each passing day, I now frequently to set my work in a strange kind of no-time, to prevent this dating process from happening.

### **The books drift through an unidentifiable time**

On occasion, with *Thursday's Child*, *What the Bird's See* and *The Ghost's Child*, I have set the books in an identifiable point in recent history; but by and large the books drift through an unidentifiable time, and the characters speak a strange, slang-less, archaic language that owes something to the Carmelite nuns who terrified me at primary school, and something to my desire to make the characters speak to every reader, not just to Australians, in a way that Hinton's

characters, though I loved them, never really spoke to me, because they were so stridently American.

### **Insects and birds as symbols**

Dogs feature in *Trouble All the Way*, and many animals roam the countryside of *Sparkle and Nightflower*, but it wasn't until later that I began to use animals to the extent I now do, when they are a defining element of my work. Animals, particularly dogs, contribute to those novels that have been the cornerstones of my career - *Sleeping Dogs*, *Thursday's Child*, *Surrender*. I use animals, insects and birds as symbols, as representatives of character, as creators of mood, and as touches of reality, but mostly I include them because I love them, and I want to encourage my readers to love them.

Indeed, as with the 13 year-old inventing boys because she liked boys, I still can only write about things that fire my imagination, so my work is dense with those subjects that captivate me most, and which now, after 18 novels, make for a troupe of typical characteristics. What I like, and what I like to write about, isn't always pleasant or easy, and hence my novels are not the books for everyone; but I don't care about that – in fact, I'm proud of it. It's important that books are written for people, particularly young people, whose interests lie outside the mainstream.

### **I write what the book needs me to write**

I write about what I like to write about, because that's the only way I can motivate myself to sit down and do the work; I write what the book needs me to write, regardless of what that might be, without regard for those moral guardians who insist that books for the young be hopeful and uplifting and sunny; and I write for those readers, particularly teenage ones, who don't want something pretty and undemanding. I never temper my work for those who mightn't be able to stomach it: instead I say, *Go and find yourself another writer*, for there are many to choose from.

In my work, I return continuously to examinations of our place in the landscape, our relationships with each other and our dealings with other species; our search for purpose and worth and the quest to live a good life; the nature of love and of its twin, loss; the ways in which truth can be skewed, the truths that lurk behind the fronts we present. I populate the stories with lonely characters, desperate characters, and I drop them into a world that is frequently under pressure in the form of geographic isolation or war or poverty or social breakdown.

These worlds are recognisably our own, but I like to give them a slight, dubious twist, to make them a place that we know but don't precisely know, where the rules aren't quite the same as our own. My characters are often social misfits – the feral child is a character to whom I return again and again, perhaps because I have always fancied the idea of being reared by wolves – and odd to the point of being mentally unstable, because I have always had a soft spot for crazies. Sometimes, in novels like *Sleeping Dogs* and *Princes* and *Thursday's Child* and *Surrender*, the characters live in a secluded world that is also abnormal, at least from the reader's point-of-view, although rarely from their own – the characters almost always see themselves as absolutely normal.

### **Life is severe**

But as crazies living in a crazy world, the characters are bound by none of our conventions, and so extremes such as murder and desertion and destruction can occur quite casually, and frequently do. On the other hand, I sometimes write about the real world from the point-of-view of alienated characters looking in at it, and seeing it as bizarre. Adrian in *What The Bird's See*, Satchel in *Stripes of the SideStep Wolf*, Kian in *Forest* and Louie in *All My Dangerous Friends* are all examples of characters in situations where real life seems incomprehensible.

In this real world, *our* real world, people are unkind to one another, people are lonely, people lose each other, spirits are broken, mistakes are made, dreams are compromised, and the characters watching this are stunned by how sad the world can be. I am often taken to task, back home, for the severe view I present of life, but my argument is that life *is* severe. In real life, hearts *are* broken, love fails, people and pets die, friendships dissolve, people cheat and lie and deliberately hurt one another, disappointments occur every day. The world I present in my work is a painful world simply because I believe that life is a good, but ultimately poignant, thing. Its finest aspects – love, friendship, humour, freedom – are frequently shadowed with sorrow. As a writer, I see no point in avoiding this hard truth, and indeed I do not think that acknowledging it makes a lesser thing of life or of a book.

### **We have the potential to be great**

It is, in fact, the victory of our species that we can be aware of the sadness in life, yet still manage to value living. This determination to exult in being alive gives splendour to our existence, but even this has its dark side: as humans, we love life so much that we are claiming it for ourselves, and leaving little room for other creatures to likewise exist. If there's anger in

my books, and there probably is, it stems from this frustration: that we have the potential to be great, but we are so often base and selfish, and these tendencies are ultimately to our own detriment, yet we do little to eradicate them.

So I write about lawless people, and I write about those who are affected by lawless people, and the world in the novels might seem alien, but not far underneath it is our world and us, with all the errors we make. Perhaps I have never stopped hearing my grandmother read *Desiderata* to me: I've never stopped hoping that the world will miraculously become a place where people *go placidly, speak quietly, listen to others, enjoy achievements, exercise caution, do not feign affection, take kindly the counsel of years*, and remember that we are *children of the universe*. And it's this hopefulness that is insulted when moral guardians accuse my books of lacking a sense of the positive.

Trees and creatures and sunshine and storms and oceans and insects and old people and children and flocks of birds stream through my books, and I hope that if the collected works say anything, it says that these are things to cherish, because every moment that we fail to do so makes lesser people of us, and makes the world a darker place.

**The prevailing attitude is that one writes for children because one hasn't the skill to write for adults**

One might reasonably wonder whether, given all this angst, I would perhaps not be wiser to write for adults than for children and teenagers. There's a lot to be said for writing for an adult audience, rather than for a young one. For a start, in Australia a writer who writes for adults is treated with a respect that a writer for children never receives.

In my country, the prevailing attitude is that one writes for children because one hasn't the skill to write for adults, and should thus be treated with appropriate derision. In Australia, as everywhere, people want the best for their children; however, when it comes to books, Australians want the best, but they don't want to pay for it. Because the public balks at paying, for a children's book, a similar amount to that which they'd pay for an adult book, publishers are forced to keep their costs down. Keeping costs down translates into publishing fewer books which have received insufficient editorial attention; a lowering of production values; and, because the sale price must be kept small, a correspondingly small advance for the author.

When a children's book goes out into the wider Australian world, it receives a stinting amount of media coverage compared to what an adult book might expect. Reviews in major newspapers, where they occur at all, often feature three or four books reviewed in an uneasy lump in the corner; national literary magazines run reviews of children's books in the last pages of the journal, having first given space to every other genre, no matter how obscure.

When, in March, the Astrid Lindgren Award was announced, most newspapers ran articles or interviews, but television took no notice, and the news was not featured on those current affair and chat shows that sometimes feature authors, and our single televised book program made no mention of it at all.

Should a book be shortlisted in the children's category of one of the various State prizes, the prizemoney will, without exception, be half that given to the winner in the corresponding adult category. In Victoria, the State where I live, the children's prize is presented at the very start of the evening, before the entrée is served, announced by school kids who stumble shyly over titles and names – all the other categories are presented between dinner and dessert, usually by a member of parliament.

No reason is ever given for this brusque and isolating treatment of the children's prize. But at least we are included in the State awards: Australia's highest-paying literary prize, the Miles Franklin, doesn't allow children's books to be entered at all.

At literary festivals, writers for the young are often segregated from the other authors present: they are rarely invited to participate in the high-profile program of the festival proper, but are pushed together into merciless 'School Days', when hundreds of bored teenagers are herded into rooms by teachers glad to escape a day of teaching them.

I have seen more than one festival hold its opening party only *after* these School Days are finished and the children's writers have been sent home. If there has been, in recent years, a slight improvement in the general Australian attitude to writing for the young, this is due solely to financial reasons, and therefore can't properly be described as an *improvement* at all.

Since Harry Potter proved that millions can be made from children's writing, the public see the undertaking through new eyes - still scornful eyes, but now avaricious as well. Most offensively,

and misguidedly, they sometimes extend this greed to the writer, and assume that anyone who writes for children is only doing so for the money.

### **Old enough to be as charismatic**

Anyway, returning to the point: given the shabby treatment of those who write and illustrate for children in Australia, I've often been asked, and often asked myself, why I persist with writing for the young. The answer extends right back to the days when I wrote *Trouble All the Way*. I was a teenager then, and it was natural that I write a book for and about teenagers – indeed, the whole point of the novel was to offer the suburban Australian teenager a chance to see themselves in print. I was sixteen when I wrote the next novel, *Sparkle and Nightflower*, and the ages of my characters were creeping up alongside my own, but they were still teenagers.

The third book, *The Glass House*, was written when I was at university: some of its characters skimmed their twenties, while others were at the tail end of their teens. It was this age group in which I found my feet, and most of my subsequent books revolve around people in their late teens or early twenties. It is an age group that, balancing as it does on a cusp, offers the best of both child- and adult worlds. Such characters can be as temperamental, self-conscious, unwise and innocent as any youngster can be. At the same time, they are old enough to be as charismatic, confident and clever as is anyone embarking on their first years of really independent life.

Sailing around these age groups, and sometimes around age groups that are considerably younger, so the characters are truly children and the books are truly books for children, I can have a character do anything, say anything, think anything, because young people are unbridled, without much grip on their emotions or much sense of the future, and lacking life-experience upon which to draw and compare.

### **I have fallen in love with my beautiful boys**

As I've grown older, I've occasionally written about older people, but apart from the really elderly ones – Beattie in *What the Bird's See*, Matilda in *The Ghost's Child*, whose age gives them a childlike charm and vulnerability - my heart isn't much in these characters. My middle-aged characters are often parents, and parents typically play minor, frequently imperilled roles in my work: their age gives them wisdom and obligations that cramp the emotional and intellectual wildness I like my characters to have.

Perhaps somewhere beneath my reluctance to raise the age of my characters lurks that spotty 13 year-old who wrote *Trouble All the Way* because it was a way of meeting boys – I have fallen in love with my beautiful boys, and I don't want them growing up and getting jobs and mortgages and wives. Perhaps I just don't like the idea of growing old myself – certainly, for one who has all her life been defined as a *young* writer – in fact I was called the teenage writer for about fifteen years – turning forty in March was traumatic, although I must admit that the *young* references petered away earlier than March. But I prefer to think there are less pathetic reasons behind my continuing to write for the young.

### **The only books which truly matter are books for the young**

There are a lot of books in the world – too many, one could argue. I worked part-time in a bookshop for eight years, and during that time I watched so many books uselessly come and uselessly go. It was an eight year trial that tested my confidence. It is incredibly difficult to sit down and devote hours of mental and physical energy into writing a novel, when one is personally aware of how many books are already out there, and how frequently they fail to find an audience, and how easily all this effort can come to mean nothing to anyone. If, in the face of this, one is going to persist in pursuing a literary career – and after eight years in the bookshop, I certainly knew to which career I'd prefer my hitch my wagon – one had better write stories that matter, for there are definitely a lot of them that don't. And it is very obvious to me that the only books which truly matter are books for the young. The rest are mere diversions – often compelling diversions, but diversions nonetheless.

### **Books for the young become friends for the young**

Books for adults are read, enjoyed, and frequently forgotten: almost always, they lack the ability to capture our hearts the way the books we read as children did and continue to do. A book read and loved by a child stays with that child for the rest of their lives, bathed in the light of fond remembrance. A book has the potential to be treasure, for a child – a gorgeous precious object over which hours are spent absorbing the pictures and the smell and the feel of the paper.

Books for the young become friends for the young - no adult participates in fictional tribulations so keenly as a child does, no adult aligns themselves so strongly with fictional characters. Young people make for adventurous, curious, and forgiving readers, willing to read what they don't perfectly understand in an inborn, ongoing quest to understand more; and because a child learns

from a book, a book can be something that influences them for the better, and hence play a small part in making a better world. And if a writer has a chance to create something that can do and be all these things, why, I wonder, would any of them ever *bother* to write for adults? It seems completely nonsensical to me, the idea that anyone would labour over something forgettable when one could, instead, enrich a child's life, write a book that is loved for a lifetime, and contribute to the betterment of the world. The fact that we are here this evening proves my point about children's books. We are not here because of books written for adults. We are here because a woman wrote stories a long time ago, but those stories are not forgotten. Those stories are, on the contrary, some of the best memories of our lives. I feel a real sense of gratitude to Astrid, to Enid, to all those who wrote the books that coloured my childhood: what writer wouldn't want to achieve so much, and be so beloved?

**I will never again write a book because I have to**

In closing, I would like to once again thank you, Sweden, for your foresight in supporting this prize, and for your generosity in allowing it to include writers and illustrators and organisations from around the world. People keep asking me what I am going to do with the money, and the answer is that I am going to use it to relax.

When writing became my career rather than my hobby, when words became responsible for paying my bills, the delight I once got from writing faded a little under the yoke. Some of the fun went out of it, when it became work. Not unpleasant work, but work upon which much depended, and that always makes a serious business of a thing. But now, because of Astrid, because of Sweden, I will never again write a book because I *have* to.

I will write, now, as I did when I was thirteen, with no responsibilities beyond the feeding of my mice. Back then, I wrote for the pure exhilaration of creating. That's what the Award will buy for me: it will buy back the priceless joy. Although the first thing Pippi Longstocking bought with *her* gold was a horse, and I have always wanted a horse, so you never know what might happen.

Tuck soar hemst micket, Sweden: I thank you, my colleagues thank you, and the world's children thank you, as will all the children and writers to come.