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# The Publishers' Spring? May '68 and the ›Radical Revolution‹ in French Children's Books

SOPHIE HEYWOOD

The years around May '68 (c. 1965 – c. late-1970s) are widely understood to represent a watershed moment for children's books in France. An important factor was the influence of a new fringe of avant-garde publishers that attracted attention across their trade in and beyond France. Using archives and interviews and accounts of some of the books produced and their reception, this article presents case studies of the most influential publishing houses as a series of three snapshots of the areas of movement in the field. At the same time, it evaluates the extent to which the social, cultural and political upheavals in France in the wake of May '68 helped to alter the shape of book production for children and to bring about a ›radical revolution‹ in the children's publishing trade.

On 23 December 1972, Maurice Fleurent, the director of picturebooks at Hachette sat at his desk and wrote a series of letters to fellow publishers and writers. He explained his excitement about the radical changes he was witnessing in his trade: »this is publishing as revolution.«<sup>1</sup> Hitherto the largest publisher in the children's market in France, Hachette's dominance was being eroded in the 1970s by marked shifts in the children's publishing field. The years around May '68 (c. 1965 – c. late-1970s) are widely understood to represent a watershed moment for children's books in France. As Isabelle Nières-Chevrel put it: »children's literature enjoyed for a short period the quasi-status of ›counterculture‹ [...] This so-called ›minor‹ literature revealed it had the power to disturb, to shock and to challenge conventions, thus proving that it could be, in effect, ›real literature‹« (2010).

An important factor was the influence of a new fringe of avant-garde publishers that attracted attention across their trade in and beyond France. These publishers were part of a phenomenon which Jean-Marie Bouvaist and Jean-Guy Boin dubbed »the publishers' spring,« (1989, p. 50) namely the ›boom‹ of small presses which appeared in the wake of '68. Just as the larger publishing houses were moving towards more global and commercial structures (computerisation, conglomeration and profit-driven editorial policies), these small presses flourished, seeming to offer an alternative to the mainstream publishing industry, which by the turn of the twenty-first century was characterised by André Schiffrin as »publishing without publishers« (1999). Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of this transformation in France spoke of a »conservative revolution« (2008, p. 123) in publishing, as the main literary field moved towards commercially driven publishing houses, which meant that even venerable literary publishers such as Gallimard were beginning to prioritise the bottom line over literary creation. Can we, by way of contrast, speak of a ›radical revolution‹ in the children's field in the 1970s?

1 Letter to François Ruy-Vidal, 23 December 1970. 44HAC/6845, Hachette Jeunesse archives, preserved at the Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine, fonds Hachette. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the author.

Through a structural analysis of the changes that took place in the children's publishing trade in France, this article explores the extent to which it witnessed a ›radical revolution‹ in the wake of May '68 when those on the margins of the field profoundly influenced the mainstream presses. While the ›springtime‹ of those years may have been relatively short-lived, the impact of the small presses, in the case of the children's field, appears to have been greater than the size and length of time during which they were active might have suggested. A large-scale analysis of the entire children's publishing trade in France at this time is clearly beyond the scope of one short article (for a non-exhaustive list of the small publishers active in this period, see Piquard 2004, pp. 55–58). Instead, using archives and interviews in addition to accounts of some of the books produced and their reception, case studies of the most influential publishing houses will be presented as a series of three snapshots of the areas of movement in the field. Such an approach allows an examination of the extent to which the social, cultural and political upheavals of the years around May '68 helped to alter the shape of book production for children in France.

### 1. Snapshot 1: Editions Harlin Quist and the 1960s avant-garde

The post-World War Two children's book market in France was buoyant but restricted by conservatism and censorship. The so-called ›thirty glorious years‹ of the postwar economic miracle would prove to be kind to the sector, as the baby boom and innovations in printing technology promoted phenomenal growth in the volume of books being produced and sold. According to the trade journal *L'Imprimerie Nouvelle*, in 1963 children's book sales had doubled in the previous five years, and by then represented 15% of overall book sales (Anon. 1963). Nevertheless, as it expanded, the industry remained steadfastly set in its ways. This was encouraged first by the structure of the field: over 80% of the children's market in this period was divided between the three publishing houses Hachette, Flammarion-Deux Coqs d'Or and Nathan, with Hachette comfortably in the lead (Soriano 1965). The cost of producing large print runs for the mass market restricted editors to »safe choices« that would be guaranteed to sell, as Louis Mirman of the Hachette children's department explained (Soriano/Guérard 1956, pp. 39–40). Secondly, the anxieties about the child in the wake of the Second World War and French collaboration, compounded by the ideological struggles of the Cold War in France, led to the children's publishing industry becoming subject to intense scrutiny, as set out in the 1949 law regulating publications for children. With this law, all publications for children and the young were prohibited from depicting »in a favourable light; criminal activities, dishonesty, stealing, laziness, hatred, debauchery, or all acts that might be termed as crimes or offences of a nature that might demoralise young readers.« The aim was to protect the nation's youth from foreign influences (notably US American comics) but also to reinforce the idea that publishers had a patriotic responsibility to contribute to the moral reconstruction of France (Crépin/Groensteen 1999; Heywood 2016). This legislation, and the far-reaching powers of the commission established to enforce it, dominated the landscape of postwar children's publishing in France. Nevertheless, there were a few outliers in the field, such as the art publishers Robert Delpire and Laurent Tisné, who published a handful of picturebooks that experimented with form (for example, Delpire's production of André François' *Les larmes du crocodile* [*Crocodile Tears*], in 1956, or Tisné's production of Zinken Hopp's *La Craie Magique* [translated from the Norwegian *Trollkrittet*] and illustrated by Gian Berto Vanni, in 1959). However, these books

were very much on the periphery of the children's sector, and indeed at the margins of the main interest of the publishers producing them. They were not aiming to challenge prevailing ideas on children's literature. By the late 1960s, therefore, the French children's book trade was ripe for change.

The winds of change blew in from abroad. New York in the 1960s was seen to be where the most exciting children's books were being published, thanks to the work of Maurice Sendak and Tomi Ungerer, and Ursula Nordstrom's audacious approach to editorial commissions at Harper & Row (Gaiotti et al. 2015). The radical movement in the US centred on challenging what was seen as the flawed representation of childhood in books as a cosy, protected universe (Heywood 2018a). Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) depicted a rebellious young boy's journey to a place to meet the »wild things,« where he danced with them in a »wild rumpus.« Sendak's acceptance speech for the 1964 Caldecott Medal, which he was awarded for the book, made his ideas clear: »Certainly we want to protect our children from new and painful experiences that are beyond their emotional comprehension and that intensify anxiety; [...] [but] it is through fantasy that children achieve catharsis. It is the best means they have for taming Wild Things.« (Sendak 1964) No doubt because he touched upon the issues of child protection and trauma, topics which had proved particularly sensitive in the debates that had led to the 1949 law, Sendak's ideas shocked, and then resonated loudly in France. As Nières-Chevrel (2010) puts it, Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* is regarded as one of the key works in the revolution in French children's books. Such is its symbolic importance, she writes, that a »legend« has grown up about the book's French reception. French critics are alleged to have spurned Sendak's book on its publication by Delpire as *Max et les maximonstres* in 1967, judging it to be »dangerous.« They preferred to ignore it rather than write harsh reviews. There may be some truth to this claim; in a letter to the French publisher François Ruy-Vidal, Maurice Sendak referred to the »fiasco« with Delpire.<sup>2</sup> Etienne Delessert suggests Delpire only sold 300 copies of the title (2015, p. 65).

Crucially, Sendak's and Ungerer's books acted as inspiration, even if they did not sell well in France. For example, the new imprint L'Ecole des Loisirs [Playtime School] (founded in 1965 as the children's department of the education publisher L'Ecole), sought to invigorate children's books in France through publishing the leading lights of the New York picturebook scene, which they discovered through the Frankfurt Book Fair. Although the French rights to Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* belonged to Delpire, L'Ecole des Loisirs acquired other titles by Sendak after their star-struck editor Arthur Hubschmid went to New York to meet Sendak around 1967 (Gaiotti et al. 2015, pp. 52–53). L'Ecole des Loisirs published Ungerer's *The Three Robbers* (1961) as *Les Trois brigands* in 1968 (Ungerer 1968), and when Delpire closed its children's department in 1969, also acquired the rights to *Where the Wild Things Are*, issuing a new French edition in 1974. Jean Delas, another editor at L'Ecole des Loisirs, recalled how they were reproached at the time for buying the rights for too many US American books. However, he argued this was because French ideas on children's books at that time lagged behind their foreign peers (JPL 2008b, p. 131). Initially then, revolution at home looked to close the gap with ideas from abroad.

*Where the Wild things Are* inspired another newcomer, François Ruy-Vidal, to become a publisher:

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Maurice Sendak to François Ruy-Vidal, 4 January 1971, held in the Heure Joyeuse,

[henceforth HJ] Médiathèque Française Sagan, archives François Ruy-Vidal, carton 16

Quite simply because it was the first book in which a child told his mother ›I'll eat you up.‹ The child is no longer subject to the fear of being eaten up, he has instead rejected and overcome it. [...] As an adult, I found *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Warwick three bottles*[sic]<sup>3</sup> were books that shocked [livres-chocs], that acted as a stimulant and incited me to think about what we could and should publish for children.

(Ruy-Vidal 1974, pp. 17–18)

For Ruy-Vidal, this was precisely the sort of material that French publishers needed to jolt them out of the state of »hyperprotection« of the child that had led the industry to slip into creative decline in the wake of war and collaboration (Capet / Defert 1971, p. 29). His work in teaching and children's educational theatre had convinced Ruy-Vidal that children's books needed to be completely revolutionised in France. He went into partnership with the US American publisher and former theatre director, Harlin Quist. They founded Editions Harlin Quist in 1967, a French company in which Ruy-Vidal owned the majority share, but which worked in coproduction with Quist's New York-based company, A Harlin Quist Book. There was a new type of structure in French children's publishing in postwar France, hitherto dominated by family-run educational presses (Piquard 2004, pp. 25–66).<sup>4</sup> Delpire and Tisé (and earlier, interwar publishers, too) had shown that children's books could be art books, even if this idea had failed to convince consumers.

Editions Harlin Quist set out to be an avant-garde literary and artistic publisher, deliberately countercultural: the aim being to shake up the staid industry through experimentation and provocation. This new press sought to bring the best of contemporary art, literature and design into children's book publishing. Their watchword was freedom. The artist Patrick Couratin recalled how illustrators usually had very little room for manoeuvre, while »Quist and Ruy-Vidal offered us an artistic freedom that was a real blast of fresh air« (2009).

As Ruy-Vidal wrote: »My question was always the same. Why did we have to be so prudent, so timid, so timorous, so boringly reassuring as soon as it became a question of children's books?« (1982, p. 5) In 1973 he would write: »There is no such thing as literature for children, only literature.«<sup>5</sup> In other words, he explained, »we ought not to make books that speak down to children, rather we must give them the best: the best artists, the best writers, the most beautiful colours, the finest writing.«<sup>6</sup>

In this spirit, Quist and Ruy-Vidal sought out the luminaries of the contemporary literary and artistic scenes to work with them. Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter declined, but Eugène Ionesco and Marguerite Duras were interested. While commissioning well-known authors to write for children was not a novel editorial strategy, their particular project produced unusual works that pushed the boundaries of children's literature to their limits. In the case of Ionesco's *Contes* (1968–1969) [*Stories*], four books for »children under three years of age,« it also proved successful. The playwright concocted a series of nonsense tales told by a hungover father to his young daughter, which played with language and levels of consciousness. The surreal potential of the stories was then

<sup>3</sup> First published as *Warwick's 3 bottles* by André Hodeir, illustrated by Tomi Ungerer, 1966, New York, translated into French as *Les Trois bouteilles de Warwick*, Paris, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> The exception to this rule of the domination of the education presses was the trade publisher Flammarion, which had opened up a children's

department in the 1930s to produce the progressive Père Castor series. On the differences between this interwar avant-garde and the 1960s avant-garde, see Beckett, 2015, pp. 217–240.

<sup>5</sup> See Grasset catalogue for the children's list 1973.

<sup>6</sup> See Grasset catalogue, 1973.

amplified in the illustrations. Sendak admired Etienne Delessert's »uncanny imaginings«<sup>7</sup> in stories number one and two, where large Cheshire cats paid homage to Lewis Carroll and rhinoceroses roamed free in children's parks, a playful nod to Ionesco's most famous play. Nicole Claveloux's images for story number four appeared to riff on the idea of the doors of perception, images of doors opening in ceilings, even inside characters' heads, and doors within doors were reflected in mirrors. Editions Harlin Quist was a tiny venture, but this was an ambitious editorial project, with four books written by a well-known avant-garde author and published in multiple languages. Recruiting such authors was a strategy for generating sales, but also for attracting the attention of critics. It was not a project to be ignored.

For Ruy-Vidal, the promotion of a new French school of artists was particularly important. He wanted to challenge the prevailing assumption that the French were incapable of producing quality children's books (Ruy-Vidal 1973, p. 92). Editions Harlin Quist set out to recruit young artists, effectively launching the careers of a number of talented French illustrators. Psychedelia, surrealism, comics, and pop art influences entered French children's book illustration in the years around '68 – with vivid results. The best example was the young Saint-Étienne native, Nicole Claveloux. She started to work for Editions Harlin Quist in 1967, not long after graduating from art school and being talent-spotted by Ruy-Vidal, who had seen her work in the magazine *Marie-France* (Bruel 1995, pp. 38–39). In her first work for a title authored by Ruy-Vidal, Claveloux balanced delicate line drawings with exuberant typography that swirled across the pages for his text, *The Secret Journey of Hugo the Brat* (1968, French edition *Le Voyage extravagant de Hugo Brise-Fer*, 1970). *The New York Times* included it in its list of 10 Best Illustrated Children's Books for 1968. The psychedelic influence was most apparent in Claveloux's illustrations for Guy Monreal's *Alala: les télémorphoses* (1970) (see Heywood 2018b). Similarly, her images for Richard Hughes's *Gertrude et la sirène* [*Gertrude and the Mermaid*] (1971) floated Heinz Edelman-inspired hippie characters across pages in an aquatic palette of purples, turquoises, greens and yellows, which amplified the nightmarish, ethereal feel of the book. François Vié pointed out that both Ruy-Vidal and Harlin Quist had a gift for uncovering talent by commissioning artists and designers to work in children's illustrations, usually for the first time (1984, p. 45). Important new French recruits also included Claude Lapointe, Henri Galeron and Tina Mercié. Finally, the publisher brought in new talent from other media, notably comics artists such as the Franco-Argentine Guillermo Mordillo and the cartoonist Jean-Jacques Loup, who further enriched the French picture-book scene.

Thanks to the renewal taking place in picturebooks in the years around '68, avant-garde French children's illustrators were beginning to gain in numbers and attract interest. The influential Swiss magazine *Graphis* was one of the first to recognise this new vitality, with a special issue dedicated to international children's book design and illustration in 1967. Works by European artists were prominent, including French books published by Delpire, Tisé and Editions du Cerf. Quist Books made their mark on the issue: one of their artists, Eléonore Schmid, designed the cover; Harlin Quist wrote the section on the USA; and they ran a full-page advertisement. Another sign of acclaim was the Prix Graphique Loisirs Jeunes, which was launched in 1971 to honour children's book illustrators and was the first prize of its kind in France. The French picturebook scene gained

7 Editions Harlin Quist paperback catalogue, 1974, p. 32.

notoriety in around Christmas 1972, when the child psychologist Françoise Dolto attacked Editions Harlin Quist in an interview entitled, *Littérature enfantine: attention danger! [Danger, children's literature!]* (1972). She accused the publisher of trying to poison the minds of the children of the social elite, and, ultimately, of threatening the moral fabric of society. Published in *L'Express*, a respected large-circulation magazine, the article hastened the eventual demise of Editions Harlin Quist in 1973. However, it also helped stimulate debate; notably the round table organised by Bermond and Boquié (1973), (on the Dolto affair, see also Heywood 2018b). Further recognition came in October 1973, when the Musée des arts décoratifs du Louvre (Paris) held an exhibition celebrating avant-garde picturebook art for children. The US American rebels highlighted at the beginning of this section, Sendak and Ungerer, were joined in the exhibition by many French names, and the publishers Delpire, L'Ecole des Loisirs and Editions Harlin Quist were well represented. The subversive reputation of the new generation of picturebook publishers was sealed. A review of the exhibition by the author Michel Tournier announced »Children's books: now everything is possible.«<sup>8</sup>

## Snapshot 2: Hachette – the establishment responds

Such attention-grabbing headlines could not fail to pique the interest of the larger children's presses, and these early rumblings of change began to reverberate in the offices of the major publishers. The first mainstream publishers to respond were education specialists. This section, the second snapshot of movement in the field, looks at the impact of this avant-garde on the largest publisher in the field – the behemoth Hachette, known to its many detractors as the »green octopus« (Mollier 2015, pp. 101–138) (and whom many of the rebels had had in mind as the worst offender when they attacked the current state of children's books).

It was becoming clear that the children's book trade could not remain hostile to innovation against a backdrop of profound social and cultural change in France. As early as 1967, an internal market study report at Hachette had identified serious problems for their picturebooks production; namely that their market share of around 35–40% in the 1950s had fallen to under 20% in less than a decade. Supermarkets and department stores were increasingly stocking cheaply produced colour picturebooks, while at the other end of the market, the report noted that »publishers are betting on increasingly intellectual parents. In this domain, only elegantly presented (if not avant-garde) books are sure to sell (the latest example of this trend is L'Ecole des Loisirs).« It concluded that Hachette had failed to keep up with competitors who had proved better able to adapt to a fast-evolving market.<sup>9</sup> »Something was in the air,« as Jean Delas of L'Ecole des Loisirs put it (JPL 2008b, p. 127). Books for children had been democratised, and rebellious youth culture was flourishing in the 1960s across Western democracies. Mothers were increasingly educated to university-degree level. For Delas, the market was also changing as a direct result of the new society engendered by '68. François Maspero, the leftist publisher and bookseller whose paperback series was credited with helping to spread the revolutionary theories of '68, also had an excellent children's section in his shop in the Parisian Latin Quarter. He became the first serious stockist of L'Ecole des Loisirs. Across France, specialist children's libraries were beginning to emerge in the early 1970s. A

<sup>8</sup> Press cuttings in the HJ Ruy-Vidal archive, carton 18.

<sup>9</sup> HAC/S14C156B3, Market Studies 1967

generation of militant children's critics, teachers and librarians were fighting for children's books to be taken seriously as quality literature by schools. May '68 had rekindled interest in progressive pedagogies, even a society without schools. Educational reform looked increasingly possible. These efforts were still on a tiny scale compared to Hachette's operations – but if schools could be taken on board, then publishers who reflected the new zeitgeist posed a potentially serious threat to the huge publisher.

In response, Hachette set up a new picturebook division in their juvenile department in 1967.<sup>10</sup> As Ruy-Vidal observed, one of the reasons why the large French children's publishing houses produced what he called »bad books« was due to their failure to invest in the books of the future: »they have the resources, and so normally they should have research and innovation divisions« (Capet/Defert 1971, p. 29). The editor who was promoted to the position of director of picturebooks at Hachette, Maurice Fleurent, was acutely conscious of this problem. For several years prior to his promotion he had been calling for Hachette's management to set up a design office [bureau d'études] to advise editorial staff on technical solutions for putting new editorial ideas into practice.<sup>11</sup> Now that he was in charge of picturebooks, Maurice Fleurent was scouting for new talent, and he set out to court Ruy-Vidal in particular. It was Ruy-Vidal's work that had elicited Fleurent's excited letter about revolution, cited at the beginning of this article. When they met at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, Fleurent (jokingly, one presumes) called Ruy-Vidal a »Maoist,« and said to him »you are the trailblazers – and Hachette will follow you« (Ruy-Vidal 1973, p. 92). Fleurent remained sceptical about the degree to which the public's taste had truly evolved, and he was convinced that these smaller publishers needed the support of the big ones. In an interview published in the literary supplement *Le Figaro littéraire* (Jaubert 1971), Fleurent referred to the small publishers as kamikazes, aesthetic adventurers on a suicide mission in a market that could not sustain them, citing the closure of Delpire's children's section and the difficulties Tisé experienced after publishing *Bussy l'hamster doré* [*Bussy the Hamster*] in 1968, as examples. This same interview floated the possibility that Hachette might distribute Editions Harlin Quist's books. Ruy-Vidal refused the offer; he had found Fleurent's overtures rather clumsy.<sup>12</sup>

Henceforth the battle cry of Hachette's new picturebooks section was »death to pink rabbits!« and that apparently even applied to avant-garde pink rabbits (Jaubert, 1971). For Fleurent the »revolution« that would overturn »this burning desire to infantilise children« must produce books that »excite children's curiosity, provoke further research, lead to a desire for further information, stimulate critical thinking and an ›intelligent understanding‹ of the world that surrounds them.«<sup>13</sup> Fleurent set out his position in the 1973 Hachette picturebooks division catalogue, which was really a manifesto for change: *10 millions de jeunes lecteurs* [*10 million young readers*]. Produced in collaboration with the literary critic Claude Bonnefoy and with a preface by the children's literature studies pioneer Marc Soriano, this booklet certainly struck a new tone (it was the first time that a Hachette children's catalogue had quoted Roland Barthes or Marshall McLuhan), but it was hardly revolutionary. In this mission against »pink rabbits,« Fleurent argued that television could entertain children, while encyclopaedias, reference books, and activity books would furnish them with the tools they needed to become »citizens who stand up, rather than lie down« (Fleurent/Bonnefoy, 1973, p. 31). Fleurent may have been

10 HAC/S14C131B4.

11 For example, HAC/S14 C140B3.

12 Letter to Marie-France Ionesco, 28 December

1997, HJ Ruy-Vidal archives, carton 16.

13 Letter to Jacques Monod, 23 December 1970, 44HAC/6845.

inspired by the changes he felt the industry was undergoing, and was keen to theorise and modernise, but he was hardly a radical '68er. Nonetheless, it was clear that the upheavals in French society generally, and in the children's books sector specifically, had inspired Fleurent and his division to reappraise their role.

There was one major project undertaken by Hachette's new picturebook division, however, that definitely was aligned with the spirit of '68. The 1973 catalogue showcased *L'Encyclopédie de la vie sexuelle. De la physiologie à la psychologie* [*The encyclopaedia of sexuality. From physiology to psychology*], which was produced in the spirit of promoting critical thinking through science. Designed to teach children and teenagers »progressively and objectively« about sex and sexuality, it was a multivolume work written for different stages of development (from children aged 7–9 years up to parents and educators). Written by a team of four doctors and a sociologist, these volumes were presented in the catalogue as liberating children; even from adult authority: »The authors have tried above all to free [*débarrasser*] young people from their fantasies (fear of being abnormal, of parental reprisals and hostility) that can compromise, even endanger, the harmony of their present and future sex life.« (Fleurent / Bonnefoy 1973, p. 146) This publication appeared just before a controversial law was passed introducing compulsory sex education into French secondary schools, brought about (in part) by the demands of May '68 (Chaplin 2011, p. 377). As an education publisher, it was to be expected that Hachette would anticipate this new market opportunity. Certainly the sales of the books were excellent, in France, and across Germany and Italy (Piquard 2004, p. 214). Nevertheless, the presentation of the subject was daring for such a staid publisher. The inclusion of sociological and psychological perspectives, in addition to medical science, and the language of empowering the young through knowledge, echoed the sex education campaigns in the media that had proliferated around 1968 (Chaplin 2011, pp. 382–384). The Communist newspaper *L'Humanité* hailed the project as »a profound challenge to traditional values« (Fleurent / Bonnefoy 1973, p. 147). One reader, a notary, filed a complaint against Hachette, arguing that the encyclopaedia was indecent, anti-natalist and pro-abortion propaganda. The case was dropped.<sup>14</sup>

Senior management at Hachette was very much aware that it needed new blood to shake up the ageing publishing house. To this end, Simon Nora, one of the heralds of a ›new society‹ in 1969, was appointed its new chief executive in 1971 (Worms 2016, p. 233). As Vergez-Sans (2016) has detailed, Nora wanted to set up an innovative children's department. In early 1973, Editions Harlin Quist folded. Nora entered into negotiations with Ruy-Vidal to see, once again, whether he could be recruited for Hachette. Ruy-Vidal agreed, but on condition that he would work for the literary house Grasset (owned by Hachette), rather than Hachette itself, and only for two years initially. This was the time he needed to publish a series of book projects that had been put on hold by the closure of Editions Harlin Quist. In fact, Ruy-Vidal stayed until 1976, and published 34 picturebooks for Grasset, including Nicole Claveloux's critically acclaimed illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland* (1974). However, the project encountered difficulties; a combination of many factors, including concerns over sales, and disagreements over book projects (Vergez-Sans 2016).

<sup>14</sup> See [http://editeurslesloisdumetier.bpi.fr/bpi\\_loi-edition/fr/affaires/sexe\\_et\\_bonnes\\_moeurs/encyclopedie\\_de\\_la\\_vie\\_sexuelle.html](http://editeurslesloisdumetier.bpi.fr/bpi_loi-edition/fr/affaires/sexe_et_bonnes_moeurs/encyclopedie_de_la_vie_sexuelle.html)

In spite of Hachette's efforts to court the avant-gardists, and to adapt to the changing market, it was clear by the mid-1970s that the large structure was ill-suited to accommodate change. Financial difficulties, the appointment of a new CEO, and restructuring meant that the moment of enthusiasm for innovation was very short indeed, and Hachette had lost its appetite for playing with loss-making experimental departments. Nonetheless, the *L'Encyclopédie de la vie sexuelle* is a fitting reminder that not all the radical projects of that time were initiated by the avant-garde publishers.

### Snapshot 3: Gallimard and Le Sourire qui mord

Grasset's recruitment of Ruy-Vidal signalled where the real shift in the children's publishing field was taking place: in the literary presses. The rumpus generated by Editions Harlin Quist had attracted attention far beyond the small milieu of children's book people, not least because of the involvement of the big names of the French literary avant-garde. It had not escaped Claude Gallimard's attention that Editions Harlin Quist had poached Ionesco and achieved critical acclaim in the process. The hitherto marginal status of children's books within the wider literary field was – among other things – the result of the lack of attention paid to them by literary tastemakers, and the fact that only Flammarion among the major French literary publishing houses had a children's department. This final snapshot shows how the years around '68 changed this by analysing the ways in which Gallimard, the main new player in the children's literary field, drew upon and worked with the avant-garde.

In 1972, Pierre Marchand and Jean-Olivier Héron, two young men who had worked in various capacities in the publishing industry and been inspired by Editions Harlin Quist, decided they wanted to publish children's books. They spoke to Héron's former boss, Massin,<sup>15</sup> art director at Gallimard. The Gallimard family had become interested in the idea of setting up a children's department, and had previously approached Ruy-Vidal and Delessert to run it (Delessert 2015, p. 101<sup>16</sup>). Senior management was therefore immediately interested in this new proposal. Marchand and Héron wanted to develop picturebooks, but also encyclopaedias and activity books, and to use Gallimard's back catalogue to launch a new, richly visual and intellectually ambitious approach to publishing books for children (Cerisier / Desse 2008, pp. 25–26 and 165–168). As Massin recalls: »They explained something to me that I had not fully realised, which was that in this domain too, things had changed after '68, and that children and adolescents should no longer be deprived of access to forms of expression that hitherto had been the preserve of adults.« (1988, p. 178) Their interest in Gallimard's catalogue was particularly timely: the publisher had just ended its longstanding distribution agreement with Hachette. Gallimard was in a phase of transition and expansion (Fouché 1998, pp. 24–25). Thus it was that Gallimard, a literary publishing house, which had only sporadically produced books for children (albeit successfully, in the case of Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*<sup>17</sup>), opened its first children's department.

**15** Robert Massin. He stopped using his first name in the 1950s.

**16** Ruy-Vidal's unpublished memoirs, preserved in the Michèle Piquard papers, University of Tours, carton 48.

**17** There was much debate as to whether this really was a book for children. However, it was published for readers aged 12 and above by Gallimard in 1948. See Cerisier / Desse 2008, pp. 121–127.

Marchand would later boast that their department had »rejuvenated« Gallimard, by introducing a new emphasis on the visual, stating that »images are also a form of modernity« (Lienhardt 1999). They did this by recruiting many illustrators from Editions Harlin Quist. The first series 1000 Soleils [1000 Suns] was launched in 1972. The series combined texts from Gallimard's catalogue (such as titles from Albert Camus and Joseph Kessel) and works in the public domain with sumptuous cover illustrations from Etienne Delessert, Nicole Claveloux, Keleck, and Patrick Couratin<sup>18</sup>. They also republished several Editions Harlin Quist titles, such as Mordillo's *Crazy Cowboy* (1972) and Ionesco's *Stories*. Two short-lived series – *Enfantimages* and *Grands textes illustrés*, both from 1978–1983 – focused on large-scale images. The folio-size *Grands textes illustrés* series took classic and longer texts and transformed them with large illustrations. These included the Douanier Rousseau-inspired images which Keleck produced for Joseph Kessel's *Lion* (1978) and Delessert's illustrations for Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* (1983). Then came the successes of the Folio Junior paperback series (1977–) and the *Découvertes* encyclopaedia series (1983–) that would lead to impressive international sales. Both of these series adopted the same formula of close attention to the role of images.

A further important component of the department's ethos was its treatment of artists and authors with the respect usually granted to ›real‹ literature: »Gallimard oblige« as Marchand liked to say (Cerisier/Desse 2008, p. 16). The names of authors and illustrators were always prominently displayed in their publications, as were those of translators. This was in direct contrast to the practice current at the Hachette children's department, which was extremely cavalier with credits. Gallimard books also included bibliographies of authors and illustrators. This was common practice in general literary publishing, but it was the first time in France that editors had bestowed this respect on children's literature.

While it was inspired by the avant-garde, as Alban Cerisier (Cerisier/Desse 2008, p. 167) underlines, Gallimard's new department had no intention of being on the cutting edge, with the attendant risks and potential losses that this would entail. Thus, the artists recruited for Gallimard had already earned their reputations, and their ›revolutionary‹ style was by now familiar, even fashionable; many of them were also working for the Catholic publisher Bayard's new youth magazine *Okapi*, for example. Instead, the model adopted was one of associating with the avant-garde through distribution agreements: small, independent publishers benefited from the distribution and marketing capacity of Gallimard, while Gallimard benefited from the unusual titles and the ideas the small, independent publishers added to their catalogue. As Bourdieu notes, it is the newcomers who generate movement, and »their very existence rescues the literary establishment from stasis« (2008, p. 141). For the Gallimard children's department, since its major strength was its literary reputation, it was important to maintain links with the intellectual avant-garde.

The best example of this continued relationship between Gallimard's children's department and the '68 avant-garde came in 1985, when Gallimard stepped in to help the publishing project, *Le Sourire qui mord* [SQM] [The smile that bites]. SQM was very much a product of the intellectual ebullition identified by Boin and Bouvaist (1989, p. 50) in the post-'68 publishing landscape. It was led by Christian Bruel, who, with the failure of political action after '68, had turned to culture as a ›second front‹ to effect

<sup>18</sup> See the full bibliography in Cerisier/Desse, 2008, pp. 207–214.

social change. As with his predecessors, Bruel was inspired to go into children's books by Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (the new edition by L'École des Loisirs appeared in 1974). He and others set up the collective Pour un autre merveilleux [For a Different Fairyland] (1974–1975) and then the publishing structure SQM in 1976, in order to publish the collective's first book, *Histoire de Julie qui avait une ombre de garçon* [*The Story of Julie Who Had a Boy's Shadow*] (Bruel/Galland/Bozellec 1976). Written by Bruel and Anne Galland, with illustrations by Anne Bozellec, *Julie* was a dark exploration of the emotional fallout experienced by a little girl when her parents could not accept her tomboyishness. It was accompanied by a pamphlet, the text of which placed their work in the context of the »new wind« that was »blowing in the land of publishing for young children,« in which »hitherto taboo themes are beginning to be discussed, experimental book design is booming, and paperback series are appearing.«<sup>19</sup> Subsequent titles were equally subversive; for example *Lison ou l'eau dormante* [*Lison or Still Waters*] (Bruel 1978), which featured a protagonist whose parents were in the process of separating, while *Qui pleure?* [*Who is Crying?*] (Bruel 1977) asked why we cry, and, more saliently, who is ›allowed‹ to cry.

SQM may have been militant, but the books they produced were neither didactic nor solely issue driven. The series Plaisirs [Pleasures] from 1980 is a case in point. These black-and-white picturebooks, with little or no text, revelled in the sensual pleasures of childhood. *Crapougneries* (Bruel/Ruffault 1980) (the title is untranslatable) depicted the mucky and transgressive delights children could find about the home, such as playing with the textures of food or broken toys, and fishing things out of the bin. The controversial *Les Chatouilles* [*Tickles*] (Bruel 1980) was a wordless depiction of two children enjoying tickling each other. As Annie Rolland writes, the book – and indeed the entire publishing project of SQM – was a product of the ideological »earthquake« of the 1960s and 1970s, which used Freudian theory to overturn taboos surrounding sexuality (2013). Rolland notes that the very name of the publishing house, »the smile that bites,« was a nod to psychoanalysis, with its play on two functions of the oral, pleasure and pain. Just as Ungerer and Sendak had first done in the early 1960s, the publications of SQM explored the imaginary of the childhood psyche in its sensual and pleasurable aspects, as well as in its disturbing and nightmarish ones.

As Bruel would later observe, the 1970s were an era when those on the margins could survive or even flourish in publishing, thanks to the social networks and countercultural structures of the period (JPL 2008 a, p. 129). Sales of SQM titles in the early years were through networks of leftist militants. Within nine months *Julie* had sold five thousand copies, and by the time of the Gallimard ›deal‹ in 1985, the title was already in its sixth edition. However, the 1980s were a much more difficult environment for the publishing project. Rising costs forced them to raise their prices,<sup>20</sup> and they experienced a series of financial difficulties, which came to a crisis point in 1985. SQM approached Gallimard and, as Bruel later wrote, »Pierre Marchand answered our call for help, telling me that ›the publishing landscape cannot afford to lose Le Sourire qui mord; the equilibrium

19 Bulletin du collectif ›Pour un autre merveilleux‹, July 1976. The SQM archives are preserved at the University of Clermont-Ferrand Special Collections, BCU cote C10124.

20 Letter to their customers, 20 Feb 1980, SQM archive.

21 Marchand had long been an admirer of SQM's books, »which I find highly original (just like the name of your publishing house)« Letter 22 Nov 1978, SQM archive.

of the ecosystem is at stake.«<sup>21</sup> Henceforth their books were advertised and distributed by Gallimard. Bruel remained at the head of SQM and retained full editorial independence: »Gallimard only sees the books once they have been printed.« (Anon. 1986, p. 25) Bruel explained that they acted as a kind of laboratory, wherein they produced difficult, experimental books (Ibid.). This arrangement allowed Marchand to maintain the links between the Gallimard department and the intellectual and '68-inspired element, and to benefit from SQM's talent scouting for experimental artists. Nevertheless, the terms of the deal were daring for Gallimard, given the uncompromising stance of the SQM and its controversial reputation. The venture produced over 50 picturebooks, including new editions of the original SQM titles under the Gallimard/Le Sourire qui mord logos. SQM discovered such talents as the artists Katy Couprie and Mireille Vautier, who would also go on to work for Gallimard. The ›laboratory‹ arrangement lasted until 1996, when Le Sourire qui mord had to close down. Marchand explained to *Le Monde* that in order to survive, Bruel would have had to agree to compromise his vision and to make concessions to commercial imperatives (some of the titles had been particularly expensive to produce), and Marchand did not want to ask him to do this (Fl. N 1996, p. 12). As Bruel's and Marchand's joint letter put it, Le Sourire qui mord was an anagram of »risque ou dormir« [risk or sleep].<sup>22</sup>

Maurice Fleurent had been correct in his assessment that Ruy-Vidal was the trail-blazer; however, it was Gallimard rather than Hachette who would follow closely in his tracks and take the field in a new direction. The Gallimard children's department, Gallimard Jeunesse, was established at a propitious moment when the market was receptive to a more ambitious type of literature for children and the large press itself was in a position to take the risk. In 1978, Hachette's internal assessment was that teachers had overwhelmingly shifted their allegiance to Gallimard's 1000 Soleils and Folio Junior series, thanks to the »halo effect« of the prestigious literary reputation of the publishing house.<sup>23</sup> Henceforth, the children's literary field was more balanced and diverse. It was no longer dominated by the three mass-market publishers, Hachette, Flammarion-Deux Coqs d'Or and Nathan, but now included an increasing number of literary or avant-garde presses such as Gallimard, Grasset and L'Ecole des Loisirs, who, for the sake of their reputation and symbolic capital, had to be more receptive to experimentation and intellectually challenging books. However, the fate of SQM shows just how difficult it was for those on the margins to survive, even with the support of the mainstream, particularly after the conglomerations and mergers in the publishing field stepped up their pace in the 1980s.

#### 4. Conclusion

This series of snapshots of the areas of movement have shown how the years around '68 helped to bring about profound changes in the children's literary field, but how radical was this »publishers' spring«? The language used by the main actors at the time was one of revolution. They felt that May '68 had altered children's place in society, and that their books had to reflect these changes. This was an idea that spread quickly, and it is fair to say that it captured the imagination of publishers, large and small alike. What resulted

22 Letter 17 Jan 1997, SQM archive.

23 S14 C33 B5, Bibliothèque Verte 1978, IMEC fonds Hachette.

was not quite the ›rupture‹ with the past they had sought, but certainly some radical '68-inspired projects saw the light of day, even in such conservative presses as Hachette. It proved to be an important moment in modern French publishing for children when the rebellious countercultural fringe attracted the attention of large presses such as Gallimard, who, by opening a children's department, bestowed it with *lettres de noblesse*. Some of the smaller presses have survived and even thrived since then, and some, as in the case of L'École des Loisirs, still play a central role in the field. Several of the books that caused waves in the years around '68 have now acquired classical status, such as Bruel, Galland and Bozellec's *Histoire de Julie qui avait une ombre de garçon*, and Ionesco's *Contes*. The ›spirit‹ of the era is continued by Pierre Marchand's former protégé at Gallimard, Thierry Magnier, who ensures that many of these titles remain in print. However, this shift can be overstated. Children's literature still has an uncertain status in contemporary France. The quality press continues to ignore it. It is the education market that has provided an important continuity in the field. And it is this link to schools on the part of L'École des Loisirs and Gallimard Jeunesse that has helped in the end to assure their durability (Piquard, 2004, p. 52). Since the 1990s, with Gallimard's purchase of the French rights to *Harry Potter*, and the resurgence of Hachette, the children's field has moved in the direction of the conservatism identified by Bourdieu (2008) and cited in the introduction to this article. Nevertheless, it had been profoundly altered by its brief springtime.

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### **Short CV**

**Sophie Heywood**, PhD, Associate Professor in French at the University of Reading (UK).

Areas of research: history of children's literature, publishing and archives policy in modern France. She was a STUDIUM / Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow 2016–2017, based at the University of Tours, Laboratoire InTRu, where she led the research project »The Children's '68.«