



Unforgotten

Books Reviewed:

[Unforgotten](#) [1]

Issue:

[210](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This is one of those picturebooks whose ambition goes far beyond telling a simple tale for young children; and which not only assumes a developed sense of pictorial narrative but seeks to touch on the fundamental questions of who we are and how we live. If that kind of description warns you of pretentiousness in either artist or reviewer, then I should add that it also a book whose illustrations are beautiful, fascinating and strange, whose story is quietly and mysteriously engrossing, and whose images linger long after you put the book aside. Angels with children's faces, identified by the text only as 'impossible birds', descend from Space towards a benighted and light speckled earth. White cut-out figures from a Renaissance painting or a Christmas card, they drift down into a dark, hard-edged cityscape of towering buildings, mist, smoke and grime. Downcast stone headed people, jumbled from different times and cultures, perhaps pasted in from monochrome photographs, walk the streets and ride the subways beside the artist's own pale and withdrawn characters. The 'impossible birds' are on a mission of compassion to these disheartened people; they seek to 'watch over, to warm and to mend?', but their work is hard and draining. One angel, weakened, falls to earth among the pale crowds, and, eventually, turning to stone, becomes a statue in a park, only to be rescued by a merciful motley gang of a boy and girl, a dog, a clown, a duck and (probably) a pantomime horse, who, themselves, watch over, warm and mend and, eventually, release the bird back to the sky. It's a poem told in pictures (and the text is written out as a poem towards the end of the book). The images appear like a stuttering lantern show, variations of light and dark, inviting the reader's imagination to sense something that remains tantalisingly out of reach, like the presence of the birds themselves. At its heart there is a double page spread of eighteen frames of the changing shape of a drifting cloud expressing the idea of 'a thought hard to hold?'. All told, it's a remarkable, mesmerising book that seeks to put into pictures yearnings that escape words.

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[1] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/unforgotten>

[2] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/210>

[3] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/clive-barnes>