



Obituary Dahlov Ipcar

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The influential illustrator remembered by **Nicholas Tucker**

Obituary Dahlov Ipcar 1917-2017

Better known in America than Britain but still with many publications over here, Dahlov Ipcar was one of the most distinctive illustrators of her time. Regularly published between 1945 and 1986, she saw herself as belonging to a movement subsequently known as mid-century modern. Breaking away from previously accepted conventions, her brightly coloured illustrations with their stylised static surroundings reached back into folk art while also looking forward to ground-breaking experimentation.

Ipcar grew up in New York's Greenwich Village. Her father William Zorach was a distinguished sculptor and her mother Marguerite an equally celebrated artist. Always painting as a child she was encouraged by her parents who believed it better for her to find her own way rather than go for any formal artistic training. Marrying aged 19, she and her husband started their own dairy farm, working hard but with Ipcar continuing to produce pictures for her own pleasure. But she was soon spotted, having a solo exhibition in New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1939 when she was only 21.

Her publishing breakthrough came in 1945 when she provided the illustrations for Margaret Wise Brown's **The Little Fisherman**. Still in print, this picture book took inspiration from the Maine coast where Ipcar's family used to go for holidays and where she now lived in Georgetown with her husband and two children. Its image of fishing boats with brown sails heading towards what must be the brightest sunrise ever still has the power to amaze.

Thirty-two more richly patterned picture books were to come, very soon with texts provided by the artist herself. **One Horse Farm** combines social realism with a lyrical description of the link between a farmer and his faithful steed. **My Wonderful Christmas Tree** recreates a winter landscape crammed with natural life. Later picture books moved away from naturalism towards increasing abstraction in a style she called 'non-intellectual cubism.' Her work remained utterly individual all her painting life, winning many honours and awards. She also provided murals for public buildings including post offices in Tennessee and Oklahoma.

Ipcar also wrote four fantasy novels for older readers. **A Dark Horn Blowing** describes a woman spirited away to help rear the sickly child of the evil Erl King. **The Queen of Spells** is an updating of the traditional balled **Tam Lan**. Here Janet, a Pennsylvania farmer's daughter, is determined to bring back her ghostly lover from a land beyond reality once she discovers she is pregnant by him. Not popular with every critic, these and her other novels still have a cult status with some.

After losing her husband Adolph in 2003 after 68 years of marriage Ipcar lived alone but kept in close touch with her two sons and grandchildren. Having slipped out of fashion her picture books found a new audience during the last two decades. Enjoying her revived fame, she was still happiest in the company of the racoons and foxes living in the forty

acres of woods she owned around her home. She hardly ever rarely travelled beyond Maine and never outside America, preferring her own company and the chance to paint every day in the studio added to their old farmhouse by her husband. She was still painting despite declining eyesight on the morning of her death at the age of 99.

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at **Sussex University**.

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