

Author and Illustrator: Marlies Bardeli and Anke Kuhl

Title: *Timur und die Erfindungen aus lauter Liebe [Timur or how love leads to invention]*

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Category: Children's, 8-12

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This book is a delight, and an uncategorisable one. It is a book about storytelling and fairy tales, about the simple things in life, about imagination and how it leads to invention. It has a quiet sense of humour and is tremendously refreshing and uplifting (but never saccharine).

The book begins from that place and phase of endless curiosity that characterises children of a certain age. Timur, while precociously sprinkling chives on his breakfast slice of bread and salami, watches his mother sweeping up and asks her why brooms have long handles. Thus begins the first of many stories spun by Timur's mother about shy Mr Kubin, who lives on a hill, and the inventions borne of his secret love for Agatha, a daydreamer who lives in a house down in the valley. Mr Kubin and Agatha, we come to understand both from the story and from Anke Kuhl's charming pseudo-medieval illustrations, are creatures from the past who co-exist with Timur's present through the power of narrative.

Mr Kubin watches the lovely Agatha from afar and anticipates her every need: he invents the brush, the washing line (and pegs) and the umbrella; leaves his love wild strawberries when she is ill and a honeycomb so that she can sweeten her breakfast. Unable to declare himself, he delivers all of these gifts at night and in secret, and Agatha, at first convinced that she must have magic talents, grows more beautiful in the knowledge that she has an admirer who considers her worthy of love. When Mr Kubin's chances of happiness are threatened by his own modesty and the romantic attentions paid to Agatha by the local landowner, Eduard von Ackerfeld, Timur finds that he can no longer listen passively to his

mother's stories and must take urgent measures to further Mr Kubin's cause. Over a series of days he dives into the story each morning, promising his mother that he will be back in his own world by dusk. With Timur's help and encouragement, Mr. Kubin overcomes the worst of his shyness and reveals himself to Agatha in the nick of time, just as she receives a marriage proposal from Eduard von Ackerfeld. The landowner and the peasant must compete for Agatha's hand in marriage by presenting her with three presents, each seven days apart, with the final present being given at Christmas. And of course Mr Kubin's inventive gifts – a seashell, a bathing suit and the very first Christmas tree complete with candles and gingerbread decorations – ultimately ensure that the lady's heart is his.

Author Marlies Bardeli is a television scriptwriter who also teaches music and the performing arts at secondary school level. *Timur* is her seventh book and was shortlisted for the 2010 German Children's Literature Award in the 7+ category. The jury commented that "Bardeli skillfully explores the nature of love in both strands of the narrative, in the context of Timur's family and in the medieval world inhabited by Mr Kubin".

*Timur* has something of Erich Kästner's narrative voice about it, with a nod to the Brothers Grimm, but there are none of the Grimms' nasties here. There is a hint of the postmodern in the book's construction of the narrative's dual strands, but rather than being self-conscious or contrived, this is a welcome device that serves to defamiliarise Mr Kubin's inventions, allowing us to appreciate them with a sense of wonder. The book has a few sly nods to the adult reader who may be reading aloud or looking over the child reader's shoulder. Timur's parents discuss the first presents they gave one another, for instance – a book by Kafka and an LP of Brahms' Second Symphony conducted by Herbert von Karajan, both of which Timur dismisses as entirely inappropriate gifts (on various levels) for Mr Kubin to give Agatha – but the book also pokes fun at the adults, whose imaginations are so stunted that they suggest Mr Kubin might buy Agatha a DVD player; in this sense, the book is ever so gently anti-materialist.

It is difficult to convey what a wonderfully simple and unusual pleasure this book is; it is heart-warming, combining the virtues of old-fashioned storytelling with narrative sophistication. I read it with great enjoyment and can only recommend it warmly for translation.