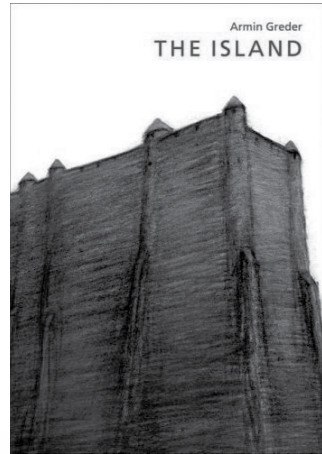


Book Reviews



THE ISLAND

By Armin Greder

Published by Allen & Unwin

Retail Price: \$29.95

Reviewed by Olga Yoldi



This somber and striking picture book for adults, and perhaps for older children, is an essential teaching resource for teachers, and for anyone, interested in human rights and refugee issues.

When a stranger is washed up on the beach of a remote island, the locals are faced with a challenge of what to do with this naked man. They become hostile towards him. They consider some options but none seem possible and he becomes this unwanted presence.

They decide to isolate him on a remote corner of the island. They lock him up in a goat pen and leave him there without any food or water. But the stranger is hungry, very hungry, so he escapes and approaches them begging for food.

The islanders have no compassion, they are angry when they realise that by iso-

lating him they still cannot avoid him. This presence is starting to sit uneasily in their consciousness. He has become a problem that needs to be resolved quickly.

Discussions follow, tensions are running high. Growing fear and intolerance take over and he is finally condemned. The islanders then decide to fortify the island against all strangers.

This amazing picture book, winner of several international awards and available for the first time in English, has been written and illustrated by Swiss born Armin Greder, who lives in Brisbane and teaches design and illustration to students at the Queensland College of the Art.

He learned to draw at school in the back of his exercise books to escape the tedium of the schoolroom. The Island is his latest book.

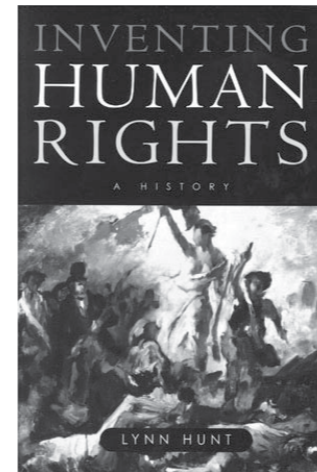
His spare prose and

mesmerising illustrations present a sinister picture of the plight of many asylum seekers around the world searching in vain for a place to live and belong to. It also illustrates the way racism, irrational fear, and intolerance can transform human beings.

The illustrations speak for themselves. They are all done in dark tones and represent very well the emotions, the anxieties and the sheer terror experienced by the stranger.

The fear, the anger and intolerance of the islanders are palpable and the vulnerability of the stranger is overwhelming.

This is an excellent resource material for teachers and group facilitators as it can be used to initiate discussion about racism, human rights and refugee issues, in the classroom or in workshops. However, it might be too harsh for younger children.



Inventing Human Rights , A History

By Lynn Hunt

W.W. Norton and Company 2007, 273 pages

Reviewed by Vincent Sicari

book. I was also a boat-person. I was also a refugee.

Of course the idea of human rights has always appealed to me. Did I not have the basic rights that are shared by all by the mere fact of being a human being? Let me clarify something: the boat I was on was the "Australia". It was 1955, I was four years old, and we were on our way to Sydney to meet my father who had fled war-torn Europe some years before to prepare a new home for us in a new land. My situation was very different to that of those wretched refugees on the sinking boat off the coast of northern Australia. It was different but I could certainly empathise. These were people like me, like my father: searching for a new land, for a new opportunity for themselves and their children. Surely they would not throw their own children overboard.

Lynn Hunt's thesis is that, as society in the eighteenth century learned to empathise with others, the idea of human rights developed. It is also a theory that depended on the development of new means of communication. The novel became a literary form that communicated the common humanity of us all. The popularity of works such as "Julie" by Rousseau and "Pamela" by Samuel Richardson introduced another person in her most intimate

reality to the public at large. We learned to empathise.

Hunt goes further to describe the process of identification with another as it occurred at the time of the publication of the famous declarations in America and France. She describes how torture came to be considered an inappropriate means of investigating the truth. The resonance of the execution of Jean Calas through the technique of "breaking on the wheel" eventually produced a general revulsion for this form of cruelty that led to the suppression of judicial torture. But for all the admiration of the ideas that Hunt so brilliantly proposes, I could not but think that her thesis, as interesting and captivating as it was, left a large part of the story untold. It was not, I felt, just the invention of the epistolary novel that produced this ability to empathise with the situation of others. Surely this was something much larger, much grander: something that encompassed, not only the movements of the enlightenment, but the history of mankind itself and our emergence from a pre-human past. Surely there are links to the judeo-christian past of our enlightenment forebears and their ideas, to their journey through the crucible of the Greco-roman culture as expressed by authors such as Sophocles and Aeschylus.

Surely the most far-reaching invention of the human mind: "Love thy neighbour as yourself" had some influence in the shaping of our human consciousness. And much more....

I felt that the children overboard story would turn around and it did. They were, after all, just people like us: wishing to be free, to be safe from persecution, from violence and the threat of death; wishing a new beginning for themselves and their precious cargo – their children. Lynn Hunt illuminated the plight of people like them and I appreciated that. She did it with wonderfully fluid prose; in a manner that captivated me with a multiplicity of images and ideas. She is a good writer. She is intelligent. But I could not help but feel that she fell short of her mark: that the story was even bigger and more interesting. And that it should be told, and that it will be told.

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