An Introduction to...
Diana Wynne Jones

“I am baffled that Diana did not receive the awards and medals that should have been hers...There was a decade during which she published some of the most important pieces of children’s fiction to come out of the UK: Archer’s Goon, Dogsbody, Fire and Hemlock, the Chrestomanci books...these were books that should have been acknowledged as they came out as game-changers...”
Neil Gaiman, from the foreword to Reflections on the Magic of Writing (David Fickling, 2012)

The Writer
Diana Wynne Jones wrote over 40 books for children and adults, and established a reputation as one of the best writers of fantasy for children, not only in Britain but also internationally. Her books draw the reader into complex, magical worlds which feel at once familiar, yet also unexpectedly strange and exciting. Although works of fantasy, they explore issues which are very real to her readers – loneliness, the sense of not fitting in, complicated and often unhappy family circumstances – but always handled with a lightness of touch, a warmth and humour which reassures her readers that they are in safe hands.

Inspiration
Diana said she simply ‘knew’, in the middle of one afternoon when she was eight years old, that she was going to be a writer. She struggled with severe dyslexia, and her parents laughed at her when she announced that she would be a writer. However, the conviction persisted and a few years later she wrote her first book.

Diana and her two sisters had access to very few books when they were growing up. Diana’s father was unwilling to spend a lot of money on books for his daughters, so having bought the complete works of Arthur Ransome he would hand out one book a year at Christmas, for the three girls to share. The rest were kept locked in a cupboard, out of reach of the children.
Diana’s mother also had very fixed opinions about what was appropriate for children to read, which meant Diana was only allowed to read what her mother considered to be ‘literature’. And anything involving fantasy or magic was absolutely not allowed!

To combat this book-starved state, Diana wrote stories to read aloud to her sisters. They were always so keen to hear the next instalment of her stories, that she quickly developed the discipline to write long narratives. Some of the stories which Diana wrote when she was young have survived in her archive. But it wasn’t until she was married, and had children of her own, that Diana started writing with the intention of getting published. One of her main motivations in writing was to tell people how to cope with the world when it goes crazy around them.

**Creative Process**

Diana never planned her stories out in full before she started writing. She would always know how the story started and be fairly certain of how it ended, and she would have a very clear, detailed picture of one or two scenes from the middle of the story. The rest, when she started to write, was unknown, and she would enjoy surprising herself as she wrote, discovering how the story unfolded. She always wrote her first draft by hand, with no revision or rewriting as she worked.

Once the first draft was written, she would do a very meticulous second draft, examining “every word and its relation to other words, then every sentence and every paragraph, and then all of these in relation to the whole book”, until she had a “clear and harmonious whole”. Then, and only then, was the book finished.

**In Her Own Words**

“Taking someone *away* from the pressures under which they live is much more valuable than grinding their noses into the fact that they are, say, of the wrong race or their parents are divorcing, or both; particularly if, while they are away, this person is given a chance to use their imagination. Imagination doesn’t just mean making this up. It means thinking things through, solving them, or hoping to do so, and being just distant enough to be able to laugh at things that are normally painful… I would call fantasy the most serious, and the most useful, branch of writing there is.”

(Reflections, p. 158)