



by Einar Turkowski  
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Fiction

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## It was dark and oddly quiet *Es war finster und merkwürdig still*

### review

This is a delightful if enigmatic tale, in which graphics and text are equally important. The brief narrative moves succinctly from the arrival of the stranger's boat on the sandbank, via his bizarre fishing techniques, to the rejection of his fish and his existence by the neighbourhood. Despite the locals' avid watchfulness, he departs unseen – apparently in order to set up afresh elsewhere. But the renewed cycle hits a snag – his first catch is not what he expects. And there the story ends.

The wide book format, black endpapers, fine black and white printing on high-quality paper – all these elements reinforce the mood of the suggestive title ('dark and oddly quiet'), and present the graphics to advantage: pencil, with the quality of fine etchings, conveying both the surreal relations depicted and the sharp realistic detail of the mechanisms involved (pulleys, wires, nuts and bolts, mechanical fish, buoys and diving bells). In these respects, the style recalls Heath Robinson, whereas the human figures suggest an obsessive animation akin to that of Edward Gorey, or Beryl Cook but without her *joie de vivre*.

And in the centre spread, which finally reveals the fisherman's techniques for capturing fish from clouds, there is an inspired touch of Spike Milligan.

The coastal location is crucial to the graphics, but not to the point of the fable; indeed, as the cover blurb suggests, it could equally have been set in the mountains, and the small-mindedness which it targets

might equally be associated with any small town or suburb in Britain or America.

Like many fairy stories, this one presents rather horrible truths about human beings. Nor is it child-friendly, for all the 'Meccano'-style appeal of its detailed graphics. Rather it points out the dangerous flaws in adults' assumptions about themselves and their role in the world. Indeed, this is as much a book for adults as for children and a most unusual production, whimsical, mesmerising and sad by turns. The young Hamburg-based artist has created something very special here and for it received the Grand Prix of the 2007 Biennial of Illustration Bratislava.

## press quotes

*'A virtuosic work of art.'* – *Die Zeit*

## about the author

**Einar Turkowski** was born in Kiel in 1972. His artistic gifts became manifest at an early age and after school he did an apprenticeship as a stage-set designer. He then studied illustration with Rüdiger Stoye in Hamburg. His graduation work (*Es war finster und merkwürdig still*) deeply impressed the examination board, and has gone on to win two major prizes: the Grand Prix of the 21st Biennale of Illustration in Bratislava and the Troisdorfer Bilderbuchpreis. He was honoured as special guest, with an exhibition, at the Bologna Fair 2008 as artist of the cover design of the *Annual*.

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Atlantis im Orell Füssli Verlag  
Dietzingerstrasse 3  
8036 Zurich, Switzerland  
T. +41 44 466 74 33  
E: [myriam.lang@ofv.ch](mailto:myriam.lang@ofv.ch)  
Contact: Myriam Lang  
[www.atlantis-verlag.ch](http://www.atlantis-verlag.ch)

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