

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA 1970 JUDGES' REPORT

BOOK OF THE YEAR:
Uhu by Annette Macarthur-Onslow. Published by Rapp & Whiting and Ure Smith.

A most satisfying book. The story has been written with a delicate restraint, yet lovingly and sincerely presented. It has all the marks of quality—literary merit, fine illustrations and excellent production.

The text which factually yet imaginatively tells how a small owl was adopted by the author and took up its abode in her cottage in Gloucestershire is quietly lyrical throughout. The prose is unpretentious, direct and simple, but given life by uncontrived imagery:

"Uhu's exercises included the 'one-way' and 'two-way' stretches. From being a round, fat puff-ball, he would suddenly become tall and thin with two long legs and one long wing. This was the 'one-way' stretch.

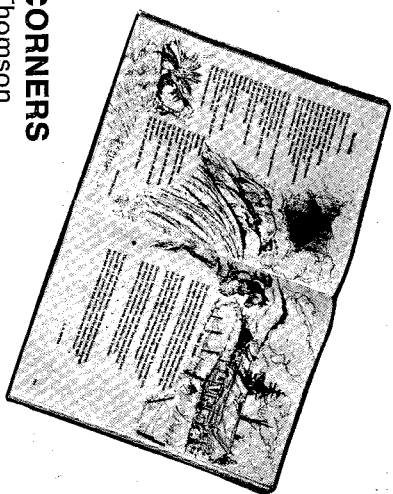
"The 'two-way' stretch meant bending forward in a deep bow and stretching both wings over his head like a heraldic eagle. He seemed to grow with every stretch."

The narrative avoids the pitfalls common in animal stories—cuteness, sentimentality and anthropomorphism. Uhu is never more nor less than an owl, yet emerges as a fully developed character in his own right. His story is told with variations of pace and mood so that the reader runs the gamut of emotions; affection, concern, admiration, exasperation, sympathy and something like grief. Uhu's coming and going is akin to the cycle of life itself.

Side by side with the story are the softly muted illustrations, each meticulously executed in line drawing or pastel wash. Each bears the personality of the artist yet each complements the atmosphere and mood of the prose that it accompanies. The illustrations vary from scientific observation to social comment; from humour to pathos; from minute detail to suggested landscape.

Some judges thought that *Uhu* should have been judged in Class B. Certainly it is an illustrated book, but not a picture book in the commonly accepted sense of that term. Nor does it qualify under the present ruling as it now stands, which states that the book must be "intended primarily for younger children". This *Uhu* is not.

The publishers are to be commended for their excellence of production. The format, paper, print and binding chosen are not to be faulted. The physical book is a quality production in its own right.



THE FOUR CORNERS

edited by A. K. Thomson
illustrated by Mollie Horseman

This beautifully produced anthology of some three hundred Australian and English poems is suitable for junior forms at secondary school. The poems are conveniently grouped under three headings: Adventure, Romance and Song; People and Life; and the World Around Us.

Also available are two seven-inch EP records of poetry readings by Peter O'Shaughnessy and Shirley Smith.

*Just published in two separate volumes priced \$1.65 each
complete book in one volume with EP records \$4.50*

SPACE ADVENTURE

Kevin R. Smith

This is the first Australian book giving carefully researched background and authentic details of American, Russian, Australian and other exploration programmes. Full use is made of technical details, diagrams and photographs. Australia's own achievements and contributions are clearly outlined, as well as the future implications for mankind of the space programme.

\$2.95

WANDJINA Children of the Dreamtime

Aboriginal Myths and Legends selected by

Roland Robinson

For more than twenty years the author has been collecting mythology from tribal aborigines all over Australia. These stories were told ages and ages before radio or television was invented. They go back to the time when the Great Spirit of the Aborigines made the world, and that is why many of the stories begin with the words "In the Dreamtime . . ."

\$2.50
Illustrated in colour

THE JACARANDA PRESS

HIGHLY COMMENDED:

Blue Fin by Colin Thiele. Published by Rigby.

In a sense *Blue Fin* is a problem novel dealing with the trial-by-experience of Snook, the inept, gangling son of the captain of a tuna boat which operates from Port Lincoln in South Australia. Snook emerges at the end of the novel as a person who has discovered the truth about himself. In the telling of his story there is excitement, humour, tension and vigour. This entry has originality and life. In its detail of existence in a fishing port and aboard a tuna boat it has verisimilitude and exactness.

Early in the book Thiele shows dramatically that the sea can be an enemy, and that the fleet and those who sail it are at the mercy of the elements. Life is a battle. Therefore the waterspout that brings disaster seems an entirely natural phenomenon, not a contrivance to give Snook the chance to prove himself. The last third of the book is magnificent. This not only is the saga of survival against the elements but it is a hymn to the spirit of endurance. The writing becomes poignant, and the loss of the *Blue Fin* realistically points up the irony of life. One's involvement in the story is complete.

The characterisation is telling: the relationship between Snook and his father being frighteningly well drawn. The touches of humour are appropriate both to the characterisation and to the development of theme and of the plot. The descriptive passages are mostly well handled but are occasionally self-conscious and studied in their use of language and their achievement of effect.

Yet the book is marred by faulty structure. The episodes in the first half of the book relate to but are not part of the struggle which ensues in the last part. Thiele takes too long to come to the point. Also he has a tendency to over-write in that there is, in places, an over-abundance of imagery; yet he does know what he wants to say and he does so—through excellent dialogue and description, well-defined characterisation and controlled atmosphere.

COMMENDED:

Apart from these two entries, most of the other books were disappointing, although the following were considered interesting for various reasons and were commented favourably on.

Ivan Southall's very exciting, topical story, *Finn's Polly* (Angus & Robertson) was one of these. The sheer professionalism of his writing is convincing and almost overcomes the somewhat hysterical atmosphere and contrived plot.

The Bates Family by Reginald Ottley (Collins) again demonstrates this author's ability to describe the inhospitable outback. Through the eyes of a drover's family, isolated and laconic, we see it in its extremes and violence. First as the earth ravaged by drought, then in the sudden fury of flash floods.

Marjory O'Dea introduces a new note with her *Six Days Between a Second* (Heinemann Educational Books). A fantasy that is not wholly successful, but has some good moments and some convincing characters. The production does nothing to help this book.

P. W. Smith's *Ombley-Gombley* (Angus & Robertson) is another departure from the more usual entries. It is a well-produced collection of nonsense verse, illustrated amusingly and cleverly by D. Fielding. Both rhymes and illustrations vary in quality, but show both humour and ability.

Finally, in *Over the Bridge* (Hutchinson Junior Books) Deirdre Hill has recreated convincingly the physical and imaginative world of one particular child. Bob's singleminded pursuit of his own interests is very true to life. There is a fresh unsophisticated quality about this entry.

PICTURE BOOK AWARD:

In Class B there were many interesting entries, but unfortunately, in most cases, the text did not equal the illustrations. Although the award goes to the illustrator, the judges felt that the book must be successful as a whole. Accordingly, they did not make an award, but decided to commend these illustrators and one publisher.

Penelope Janic for her lively and attractive illustrations in both *The Ha-Ha Bird* (Paul Hamlyn) and *Donovan and the Lost Birthday* (Heinemann).

Noela Young for her meticulous and engaging work in *John, the Mouse Who Learned to Read* (Collins).

Ted Greenwood for his *Obstreperous* (Angus & Robertson) which was considered the best integrated book in that the story and illustrations came closest to complementing each other successfully. The illustrations are clear, simple and well designed and the book well produced. The story is unsuccessful in presenting its sophisticated theme—the independence of the creation from the creator—to its audience of young children.

The publishers Paul Hamlyn, for producing the *Australian Sunshine Book Series*, attractive picture books at a very reasonable price. Again, in this series the colourful, gay, modern illustrations are more exciting than the stories.