

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS

1974

CLASS A—BEST AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S BOOK OF
THE YEAR

The Nargun and the Stars by Patricia Wrightson (Hutchinson).
Author to receive the Children's Book Council Medal and the
Literature Board Award of \$1500.

Highly Commended: *The Spirit Wind* by Max Fatchen (Methuen/
Hicks Smith). Author to receive \$750 from the Literature Board
Award.

Commended: *The Fire in the Stone* by Colin Thiele (Rigby).
Author to receive \$250 from the Literature Board Award.

Commended with Special Award of \$250: The text of *The Bunyip
of Berkeley's Creek* by Jenny Wagner (Longman Young Books).

CLASS B—PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR

The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek by Jenny Wagner and Ron
Brooks (Longman Young Books). The Children's Book Council
Medal awarded to the artist, Ron Brooks.

Commended: *The Giant Devil Dingo* by Dick Roughsey (Collins
Australia).

CLASS C—The Visual Art Board of the Australian Council for
the Arts Award for Illustration.

BEST ILLUSTRATED CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR:
\$1500 awarded to Klimeny and Deborah Niland for their illus-
trations for *Mulga Bill's Bicycle* by A. B. Paterson (Collins Aus-
tralia).

Commended with Visual Art Board Award of \$600: Ron Brooks
for the illustration of Jenny Wagner's *Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek*
(Longman Young Books).

Commended with Visual Art Board Award of \$400: Dick Rough-
sey for the illustration of his own text in the legend of *The Giant
Devil Dingo* (Collins Australia).

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS
JUDGES' REPORT 1974

Many of the books entered for the Award this year were good in parts,
but unsuccessful as a whole. There was some vigorous competent writing
and sensitive illustration, but these were often marred by poor editing and
a lack of awareness on the part of some publishers of what constitutes a
good and attractive book for children. In view of the growing stature of
the Awards and the increasing national and international interest in Aus-
tralian children's literature, the judges were disappointed at the general level
of achievement in many of the books submitted.

In this year's entries the upsurge of material with an Aboriginal back-
ground was most marked and much of this was excellent, but suffered from
uneven and discordant production. There were a good many entries from
new authors and illustrators some of whom won awards. The youngest
author was seventeen-year-old Anne Farrell whose family story *The Gift
Wrapped Pony* showed a fresh and lively awareness of people and places.

Most of the non-fiction, though useful in specific areas was downright
old-fashioned in presentation. On the whole the fiction was handled better.
Several authors made ambitious and original excursions into the realm of
fantasy, not all of which were successfully sustained. The fantastic element
in some seemed to be merely superimposed upon the natural world in an
arbitrary and artificial manner. Nevertheless it was a book from this cate-
gory that finally won the judges' approval. Even so, they had some reser-
vations about the ending and thought that the Deus ex Machina clanked
rather audibly (literally) and that the author was not at all times in full
control of her difficult material. However, they were impressed with the
originality and scope of the work, and considered that it deserved the
award.

CLASS A—Book of the Year Award WINNER

WRIGHTSON, PATRICIA *The Nargun and the Stars*

Hutchinson

The author's elemental creation, the Nargun, seems to embody the time-
less, patient land. As old as the rocks from which it has its being, it is
both impressive and menacing in its blind primeval urge for survival. By
contrast some of the other mythical creations seem lightweight, although
they certainly provide humour and excitement for the human characters
in the story. In spite of its somewhat enigmatic title the theme of the book
appears to be adjustment to a new situation. This theme is worked out
through the relationship between the orphaned Simon and his elderly
cousins and more importantly, through the boy's ready acceptance of the
spirit creatures who inhabit the land.

As usual in this author's work, the observation of everyday detail is
precise and telling and the characters of the cousins are splendidly drawn.
Simon is a much more shadowy figure, perhaps deliberately so. As some-
thing of a nonentity, he emphasizes the brooding presence of the Nargun

and the virtue of his characterization lies in his sensitivity to atmosphere which makes much of the plot development possible. The quality of the production and mood of the dust jacket are in keeping with the book as a whole.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

FATCHEN, MAX *The Spirit Wind*

Methuen/Hicks Smith

Superficially this is an exciting traditional sea story, set in windjammer days, with the characterization and plot no better than this type of story normally demands. The female characters are particularly thin. The book takes its strength from the supernatural element introduced in the mythical character of the Aboriginal, Nungane, who symbolizes the relationship between man and the forces of nature and with whom the author seems to feel a peculiar empathy. The style is controlled and professional and the illustrations and dust jacket reflect the tensions, if not the period of the book.

COMMENDED

THEIJE, COLIN *The Fire in the Stone*

Rigby

This is primarily an adventure story related with an easy command of language. The book loses much of its impact because of the innumerable threads and incidents which combine to make it long and cumbersome. While the incidents are excellent in themselves, they do little to further the plot or develop the characters. Set in the opal fields, the vivid description of the harshness of the land emphasizes the theme of man's difficult relationship with his fellows. The imaginative visual images of the text have been ignored by the publisher who has resorted to a conglomeration of colour in place of a co-ordinated dust jacket and binding.

WAGNER, JENNY *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek* Longman Young

This story attempts the formidable task of explaining Berkeley's philosophy to young children. It could have been a disaster but the author has cleverly chosen the elusive bunyip to illustrate the point. The judges were so impressed with the economy, structure and rhythm of the text that they took the unusual step of commending it in this Class.

CLASS B—Best Picture Book of the Year WINNER

WAGNER, JENNY (text) and BROOKS, RON (illustrations)

The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek Longman Young Books

Author and artist have combined to present an attractive and enjoyable book for young children, which is what is required for this award. The quality of the text has already been recognized in Class A. The illustrations, though derivative are original in their harmonious awareness of the subdued colouring and twilight qualities of the Australian landscape. Some liberties, however, have been taken with our natural history, especially with the seemingly hermaphroditic wallaby and in the poorly designed cover.

COMMENDED

ROUGHSEY, DICK *The Giant Devil Dingo*

Collins Australia

This was a highly individual entry which retells an Aboriginal myth. The illustrations with their dramatic and striking use of colour evoke the unique atmosphere of the remoter parts of our continent. Mr Roughsey is less certain with words and the text lacks the subtlety of the illustrations.

CLASS C—Visual Arts Board Award

This year for the first time the Visual Arts Board, hoping to encourage and help illustrators of children's books, made a grant of \$2500 for this purpose. The major award in this section went to the young Sydney artists, Kimmy and Deborah Niland for their illustrations of A. B. Paterson's ballad *Mulga Bill's Bicycle*. Although this is not an outstanding publication the visual continuity of the illustrations captures the momentum and humour of the text. The acceptable element of caricature is in keeping with the period of the verse and is far more sensitive than the slick clichés of animated cartoons.

The other illustrators who received an award were Ron Brooks for *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek* and Dick Roughsey for *The Giant Devil Dingo*. Both these books have been mentioned in Class B.

Consideration of this grant highlighted the role played by the publisher who does not always supervise, through a qualified designer, the integration of dust jacket, binding, end papers, layout, typography and quality of paper.

The unfortunate authors and illustrators are not always in control of these factors and the individual and sensitive approach of a number of illustrators was nullified by this quantitative rather than qualitative attitude. The books with photographic illustrations also suffered from this lack of attention to layout and there were many overcrowded pages.

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OVERSEAS AWARDS:

Guardian Award 1974:

Winner: Barbara Willard—*The Iron Lily* (Kestrel).

Runner-up: Nina Bawden—*Carrie's War* (Gollancz).

(The Judges were: Edward Blishen, Leon Garfield, Philippa Pearce, Isabel Quigly and John Rowe Townsend.)

Carnegie Medal:

Winner: Penelope Lively—*The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* (Heinemann).

Greenaway Medal:

Winner: Raymond Briggs—*Father Christmas* (Hammish Hamilton).

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Margery Fisher will be visiting Australia for the Library Association's Conference in Melbourne during August 1975. More details in next issue.