

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA JUDGES' REPORT 1977

GENERAL STATEMENT

Entries for this year's award included works by an encouraging array of new talent as well as established authors. Once again, the influence of good editors of children's books was apparent in the best entries and sorely missed in many others. Of the thirty-eight books submitted for judging, over half failed to reach even reasonable standards of quality. The judges deplored the blatant typographic errors and careless placement of illustrations in several productions, some of which were otherwise of high standard. Nevertheless, the high literary and artistic quality of many entries was heartening and made selection of the eventual winners gratifyingly difficult.

Class A—BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

SPENCE, Eleanor *The October Child*

O.U.P.

In deciding on this award, the judges were most appreciative of the skilled, sensitive and yet restrained treatment which Eleanor Spence gives to a poignant and potentially over-sentimental theme. The effect of stress on each of the characters is portrayed calmly, vividly and convincingly. In particular, the growth of Douglas over a number of years and in a variety of circumstances is a fine piece of natural portraiture. The author's impressive descriptions of settings and people are in no way assisted by illustrations so poor that they detract from the pleasure of an otherwise memorable and involving novel. Her meticulous control of her work, her ear for realistic dialogue and her capacity to write with honesty and insight about personal relationships make this a novel of distinction.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

PHIPSON, Joan *The Cats*

Macmillan

This intriguing and compelling adventure story was welcomed by the judges as an established author's further exploration of new directions in her writing. The interplay of changing relationships in situations of dramatic tension is developed with outstanding realism. While the power of the story commands much admiration, the judges questioned insufficient development in plot and characterization, particularly in the motivation of Willy.

COMMENDED

SYRED, Celia *Hebe's Daughter*

Hodder & Stoughton

The judges found the vitality and sheer gusto of this picaresque novel most refreshing and enjoyable. While it is doubtful if so many startling events could occur in so short a period, the strong realisation of the many settings, the vivid vignettes of minor characters and above all the attractive and unquenchable heroine combine to make this an engrossing book.

FURTHER COMMENTS

Time Sweep by Valerie Weldrick deserves special mention for its fresh approach to Australian fantasy without the all too familiar symbolism of some of its stridently Australian predecessors. The judges reacted warmly to this first novel and saw in it much promise. The translations in time and place are well controlled, the depiction of nineteenth-century London is graphic and interesting but the writing is less controlled towards the end.

The Convict's Daughter by Joyce Nicholson begins excellently with admirable evocation of the stench, squalor and misery of living conditions on the convict ship. However, in the judges' view, the quality declines after the Australian landfall with the exception of the passage describing the crossing of the Blue Mountains. Joyce Nicholson has tried to embrace too much material within one novel and allows plot to dominate characterization in the last two-thirds of the book.

Class B—PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR

The standard of entries in Class B this year was extremely disappointing especially in view of the high standard attained in 1976. Regrettably, it was decided that by international standards and in comparison with previous Australian award winners no book submitted was worthy to be honoured as the Picture Book of the Year.

For the first time the money offered by the Visual Arts Board was available for the award winners of the Picture Book of the Year competition in the judging of which both text and illustration are considered.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

NILAND, Deborah *ABC of Monsters*

Hodder & Stoughton

Freshness and spontaneity characterize the work of Deborah Niland in her delightful ABC book. The warmth and simplicity of the illustrations extend the humour in the text creating that unity of art and language which is basic to good picture books. The standard of production is high, from the continuity of the design across the cover and the attractive end papers through the careful placement of the text on the page to the judicious use of white space. The text with its appealing alliteration provides a valuable language experience for the young child. The publisher is to be commended for the production of a quality book which is relatively inexpensive.

COMMENDED

NILAND, Deborah and Kilmeny, illustrators of *Tell Me Another Tale* by Jean Chapman

Hodder & Stoughton

This second collection by Jean Chapman contains a rich assortment of folk tales, rhymes and activities for the developing five to eight-year-old child. As in the earlier collection the Niland sisters' zany illustrations are subtly balanced with the text both complementing and extending it. Contrasts between large and small as well as between black-and-white and colour are effectively used to underline the author's meaning. Although the book is unfortunately marred by some unevenness in the quality of the text, it is a charming production with wide-ranging appeal.

FURTHER COMMENTS

The judges were pleased to note entries by several previously unpublished illustrators. These included Peter Payey whose drawings enhanced Olaf Ruthen's unusual book *The Day of the Diprotodon* and Andrew Park whose humorous illustrations enlivened *See the Sea* a language resource book by Virginia Ferguson. Patricia Mullins also attracted much favourable comment for her dramatic paintings in *Fabulous Beasts*.