

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA  
CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS  
1979

*Judges' Report*

The judges were delighted to note the continuing interest in the Children's Book of the Year Awards as evidenced by the 69 entries, many of which were of good quality and some of which add significant new dimensions to children's literature in Australia. In particular, there was an encouraging proportion of entries suitable for middle primary readers, a level generally considered to be inadequately catered for.

Despite many examples where the quality of book production and design was of an acceptable, and occasionally outstanding level, the judges were disappointed to find a disturbing number of entries with faults in this area. Many writers were ill-served by inadequate editing, careless proof-reading and poor book-design. Such faults inevitably diminish the chances of entries and, more importantly, reduce their impact on their intended readers.

The judges were pleased to discern a growing capacity in Australian writers to produce light-hearted books as well as touches of humour in even the more serious stories, and express the hope that this may be a continuing trend.

**Class A—CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR**

**WINNER**

MANLEY, RUTH *The Plum-Rain Scroll*

Hodder & Stoughton<sup>1</sup>

This impressive first novel is well-constructed with excellent characterization. It is a light-hearted romp through Japanese mythology, blending high drama and seriousness of purpose with an exciting plot. The quest for the Plum-Rain Scroll lends a unifying theme to the episodic form of the novel. Ruth Manley's dialogue is a delightful mixture of poetry and astringent humour which helps to convey the eccentricities of the many characters. The undoubted wide appeal of the book is enhanced by its attractive production.

**HIGHLY COMMENDED**

SCOTT, BILL *Boori*

Oxford<sup>2</sup>

Bill Scott uses elements of Aboriginal folklore to create a powerful, compelling novel in the best tradition of heroic fantasy. His style is spare and direct, yet often poetic and enlivened by a dry humour which arises from the interaction between characters. Always implicit is a sense of the dignity of the Aboriginal people.

Regrettably, despite an attractive jacket, the unappealing design and physical production of the book may daunt many potential readers.

**COMMENDED**

GREENWOOD, TED *The Pochetto Coat*

Hutchinson

In this finely-drawn tale with a circus setting, the sense of tradition passing from an older to a younger generation is delicately conveyed through stories of pathos and humour told by an old clown. Ted Greenwood's text and Ron Brooks' illustrations combine with excellent design to make this an example of fine book production.

PARK, RUTH *Come Danger, Come Darkness* Hodder & Stoughton<sup>3</sup>  
Set against the background of Norfolk Island in convict times, this is an interesting historical novel with convincing characterization and a well-paced plot.

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

The judges wish to record their admiration for Patricia Wrightson's novel *The Dark Bright Water* (Hutchinson),<sup>4</sup> However, they do not consider this to be a children's book as both theme and treatment demand a mature readership.

Among the new authors, Phyllis Harry shows promise with *Gone Children* (Nelson)<sup>5</sup>; *Search for Tiger* (Angus & Robertson) by Judith Worthy and *Cats Don't Bark* (Hodder & Stoughton)<sup>2</sup> by Joan Dalgleish will be enjoyed by children of middle primary age.

**Class B—PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR**

This year again there was an encouraging number of well-produced, enjoyable picture books, including some for very young readers. While most of the entries had an Australian flavour, they displayed great diversity and originality in both style and content.

**WINNER**

TREZISE, PERCY and DICK ROUGHSEY *The Quinkins*

Collins<sup>2</sup>

The detail and vivid colour in the lively illustrations of this simple Aboriginal legend make it both attractive and accessible to young children. Evil spirits in the best folklore tradition who try to lure children away, benign creatures who protect them, and a secure family base are the important elements in the story.

**HIGHLY COMMENDED**

ARMITAGE, RONDA and DAVID *The Trouble With Mr. Harris*

Hutchinson Australia/André Deutsch, U.K.<sup>5</sup>

This thoughtfully-designed book presents an intimate picture of a small community. The theme of acceptance within a group gives it a universal appeal. The engaging pictures carry the action of the story while at the same time they are full of the details that children love to pore over.

**COMMENDED**

MCLEAN, ANDREW and JANET *The Riverboat Crew*

Oxford

This light-hearted picture book with its simple, neatly-constructed story, appeals to very young children. Its effectiveness stems from the choice of colour and successful use of cross-hatching. The judges noted its suitability for display during story-telling.

AXELSEN, STEPHEN *The Oath of Bad Brown Bill*

Nelson<sup>2</sup>

Grim and gruesome ghosts and ghouls challenge the courage of our blustering bushranger in rollicking verse which at its best is full of go and gusto. Suitably ebullient, inventive illustrations accompany the text and provide fun for all ages.

**Reviews:**

1. R.T. October 1978.

2. R.T. April 1979.

3. R.T. January 1979.

4. P. 44 this issue.

5. P. 16 this issue.