

## BITS AND PIECES

### MAY GIBBS HOUSE

The NSW branch of the Children's Book Council of Australia has asked for urgent support in saving Mays Gibbs's house, Nutcote, in North Sydney. If you can send letters of support by way of a professional opinion or financial donations, which are tax deductible, then write to The May Gibbs Foundation 23 Huntley's Point Rd, Huntley's Point 2111. If you are willing to help please write immediately.

## ARTICLES

### JUDGES' REPORT — 1987

For the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award, the Children's Book Council of Australia wishes to acknowledge the generous support of the Literature and Visual Arts Boards of the Australia Council.

The conditions of entry direct the panel to consider books entered in three categories:

- Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year: Older Readers
- Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year: Younger Readers
- Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year.

These awards are primarily for literary merit. However, the quality and design of the book as a whole are part of the standard, so the judges will consider the following, listed in alphabetical order:

- appeal to children
- book design, production and quality of printing, having regard to the price at which it is published
- illustration
- literary merit: cohesiveness, plot, theme and style

### Book of the Year: Older Readers

This award is made to outstanding books which generally require mature reading ability to appreciate the topics, themes and the scope of emotional involvement.

A medallion shall be presented to the author of the Book of the Year: Older Readers.

### Book of the Year: Younger Readers

This award is made for books for readers who have developed independent reading skills but are still developing literary awareness.

A medallion shall be presented to the author of the Book of the Year: Younger Readers and a further medallion shall be presented to the illustrator, if in the opinion of the judges the illustrations add significantly to the text.

### Picture Book of the Year

This award is made to outstanding books in which the author and illustrator achieve artistic and literary unity, or in wordless books, where the story, theme or concept is unified solely through illustrations.

The judges may also consider the following guidelines, applied where appropriate:

- match of artistic style, media and artistic elements of colour, line, shape, texture to written text or idea
- match of layout and design elements to written text or idea
- balance of amount of illustration and written text
- combination of illustration and written text/idea between individual pages from beginning to end.

A medallion shall be presented to the illustrator of the Picture Book of the Year and a further medallion shall be presented to the author of the text where the author is not the illustrator.

### General Remarks

Of the 113 entries received this year approximately one half were eligible in the Picture Book section, 30% in the Older Readers section and 20% in the section for Younger Readers. In several cases where an entry might have suited either older readers or younger readers, it was placed in the section where it was considered it would be available to the widest age range.

Some difficulty was experienced initially in establishing the boundary between what could be considered a book for children and an adult book. *Malloway*, *The sugar factory* and *The true story of Spit McPhee* were the three entries which provoked such discussion. Qualitatively, however, only Aldridge's *The true story of Spit McPhee* would have been a cause for concern when decisions for shortlisting and major awards were being made.

The major guiding factors in decision making on this matter were the imprint under which the publisher chose to market the book and the perspective from which the book was written. It was not the intention of the selection panel to dissuade mature readers from this range of books, but rather to direct younger adolescent readers to a wider range of themes.

In the three categories specific themes tended to emerge — social issues for older readers, warm humour and slapstick fun for younger readers, and a plethora of bush baby publications in the Picture Book section. Overall the entries were heavily weighted to fiction, and were considered to be representative of the high quality of production and design reached today in Australian publishing for children.

The panel expressed regret that more of the high quality non-fiction published in Australia during 1986 was not put forward for consideration, but there was a general expression of pleasure in being able to sample such a wide range of publications which will be available to our children during 1987.

Mention must be made of the more than usual number of errors appearing in a number of otherwise high quality publications, indicating both a lack of skilled editing and poor proof reading and/or typesetting. As well, many entries were marred by overt didacticism making its appearance in 1986 guise. The slight number of and lack of quality in books suited to younger readers made the shortlisting in this section quite difficult. Consideration was given to listing only five but the panel in wishing to express support to publishing houses for the efforts made on behalf of this age group listed the usual six titles, all of which were worthy of mention in some way.

#### General Comments — Older Readers

The judges commented the level of excellence reached in publications for older readers, the contribution made by new authors and the diversity of theme and style evident in those eventually shortlisted. Some of the areas highlighted in the treatment of social issues were conservatism and social responsibility, diverse family situations and interaction, peer group tension and crisis points in personal development connected with a need to know and understand one's origins. The balance of realism and fantasy was noteworthy and most skilfully blended in *Space demons* and to a lesser extent in *My sister Sif*. In every shortlisted book some reference is made to a warm caring family, as supporting the quest/search of the protagonist. This was a general underlying theme in other novels with equally diverse settings, present, future and past. Mention must be made of the unobtrusive but varied writing styles skilfully matched to theme and setting.

A new author deserving a specific mention in this section is Caroline Logan for the *Power of the Rellard* — a sound first effort in the difficult field of high fantasy.

#### Book of the Year — Older Readers

**FRENCH, Simon** *All we know* A&R. Literature Board Award

Of the six outstanding books for older readers, the panel agreed that Simon French's unostentatious rite of passage in *All we know* was a most securely written restrained and sensitive narrative. It was deemed most worthy of the highest award in this category. Skilled characterization, exact unpretentious dialogue, gentle warm and diverse family interaction, balanced with realistic tension in both home and school, make this book outstanding in its class. That it is relevant to a wide age-range of readers and that the central theme though firmly set in 1986 has a timelessness, makes this book one which the panel agreed would be valued for many years to come.

#### Honour Books

**RUBINSTEIN, Gillian** *Space demons* Omnibus/Penguin. Literature Board Award

Gillian Rubinstein, a new author, with her entry *Space demons* provided one of the most gripping novels shortlisted. The accurately portrayed new age technology and the age old personal struggle between good and evil make this another most skilful blend of realism and fantasy. As the child characters struggle and eventually overcome the power of hate in their lives by learning to love in different situations, we the readers are in well recognized situations. The social interaction between upper primary school children and the accurate portrayal on non-stereotypical family situations makes this book not only a good read but a book of value and quality for this age group.

**KELLEHER, Victor** *Taronga* Viking Kestrel. Literature Board Award

A strong and powerful statement on society in 1986 is made by Victor Kelleher in *Taronga*, in which he leaps ahead to a fearful holocaust. In the aftermath of *Last Days*

Kelleher's fourteen year old character Ben uses a developed sixth sense in his attempts to survive, whilst at the same time suggesting the eventual demise of humankind as we know it. The sense of utter hopelessness, and the comparison drawn between the attitude of the traditional owners of this land and society, the violence and *the call* which is central to the theme, make this book undoubtedly controversial, thus provoking discussion which the panel feels Kelleher has intended. Perhaps food for thought in 1988.

#### Shortlist

**BAILLIE, Allan** *Riverman* Nelson

**PARK, Ruth** *My sister Sif* Viking Kestrel

**SHARP, Donna** *Blue days* University of Queensland Press

*Riverman* and *My sister Sif* share a common theme of conservation, the former set in Tasmania earlier this century, and the latter in the waters surrounding an island in the near Pacific Ocean approximately one hundred years further on.

In *Riverman* the panel had some difficulty with the structure which was felt to compartmentalize the novel, but all agreed that Baillie has produced a worthy publication in which the taut and economical prose indicates his development as a writer. The sense of awe and reverence evoked for the wilderness areas of Tasmania in his skilfully drawn setting, combined with sound characterization developed through the working out of grief and resentment are the work of a skilled writer and storyteller. In addition the historical accuracy and its portrayal of social history of the time make this book worthy of comment.

The art of a skilled storyteller is again evident in *My sister Sif* where we are enticed to indulge our sense of fantasy whilst the finely crafted writing of Ruth Park holds us in careful balance between imagined and real worlds. Though the author is perhaps a little too eager to give us her message, clearly her latest work is noteworthy in its class — one of six outstanding 1986 publications which could only enrich the lives of any reader.

Donna Sharp's *Blue days* was felt to be worthy of recognition too — a sound effort from a new author, writing in a difficult area. UQP is commended for its publications in the young reading market. As with all other shortlisted books, the realistic drawing of characters and setting and the relevance of theme was impressive.

#### General Comments — Younger Readers

Both the number and quality of books entered for this age group was disappointing and the panel's reasoning in still listing six titles worthy of mention in some way has already been stated. For an age group as equally deserving of quality publications as their older counterparts the panel noted a need for greater diversity in theme, style and format. Originality of idea and cohesive plot structure were particularly lacking. We look forward to attention being focused on reading for this age group during the coming year, thus capitalizing on an opportunity to consolidate young readers' skills and to develop life long literacy enjoyment.

#### Book of the Year — Younger Readers

**RODDA, Emily** (text) Noela Young (illus.) *Pigs might fly* A&R. Literature Board Award

While several of the books in this section dealt with warm human relations and family interaction, *Pigs might fly* was regarded as outstanding. Emily Rodda has produced an original, coherent and finely crafted, very humorous novel, able to be enjoyed on several levels and so obviously being appreciated already by many younger readers.

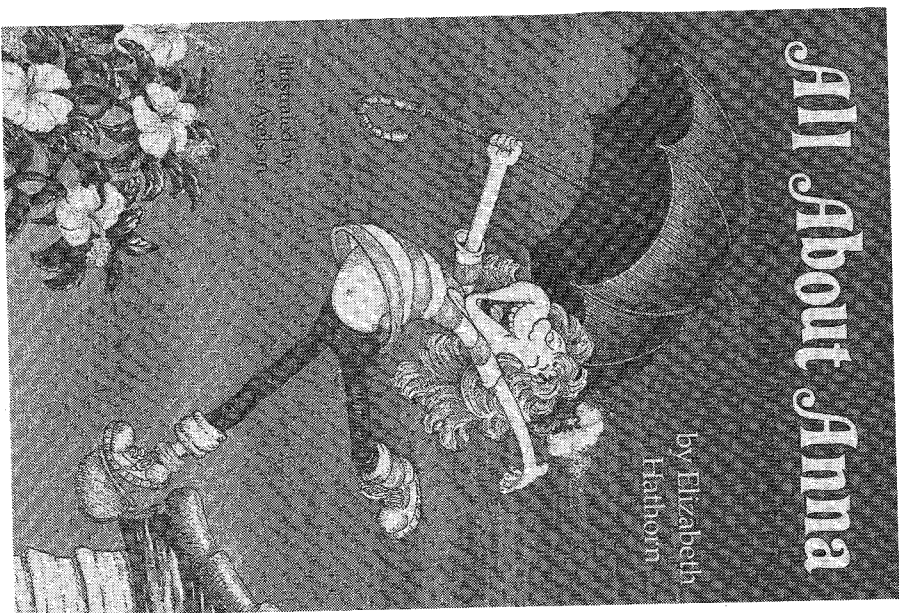
### Honour Books

HATHORN, Elizabeth (text) Steve Axelson (illus.) *All about Anna and Harriet and Christopher and me* Methuen. Literature Board Award

The panel agreed that this book, whilst not being exceptional in any way, was a successful attempt to engage this age group in some worthwhile entertainment and at the same time to portray realistically home and family relationships.

MCLEOD, Doug (text) Craig Smith (illus.) *Sister Madge's book of nuns* Omnibus. Literature Board Award

Commended also is *Sister Madge's book of nuns*. Rollicking good fun and excellent design and illustrations make the publication unique in this section, where the panel felt it would reach its widest child audience. Combined with the irreverent verse of Doug McLeod, Craig Smith's skill and versatility as a book illustrator so ably demonstrated here is worthy of special mention.



Reading Time, Vol 31 No 3, 1987

### Shortlist

THIELE, Colin (text) Mary Milton (illus.) *Farmer Schulz's ducks* Walter McVitty  
DUGAN, Michael (text) Elizabeth Honey (illus.) *Melissa's ghost Dent*  
KLEIN, Robin (text) Helen Panagopoulos (illus.) *Boss of the pool* Omnibus

Colin Thiele's well written story *Farmer Schulz's ducks* accompanied by Mary Milton's most appealing and artistically meritorious duck paintings make a more serious contribution here for younger readers.

A good, but less exciting read is *Melissa's ghost*, Michael Dugan's sensitive story set in an accurately portrayed rural area. With some quality points also is Robin Klein's *Boss of the pool*. Whilst the relationship between Shelley and her mother was well drawn, the panel felt that much of the book smacked of the need to write about a disability.

### Picture Books — General Comments

Picture books this year made up approximately one half of the entries received and because of the removal of the age barrier a selection was able to be made with a diverse readership in mind.

The large number of entries was, however, not indicative of even quality in text and illustration. While the panel noted continued improvement in book design and production, illustrations of high quality were frequently let down by banal or pedestrian texts.

The panel agreed that the titles shortlisted have all made some significant contribution to literature for children in widely different areas. Noted also this year was the large number of books obviously aimed at the literature based approach to the early literacy market. Unfortunately some of these in terms of stilted language and trivial illustrations, were not far removed from the old style basal reading scheme materials.

Many texts were in tedious verse and the best interests of our native fauna were not always served in the many undignified attempts at anthropomorphism. Stereotypical family situations also reflecting attitudes not expected in 1986 thinking and certainly in contrast to attitudes reflected in the best publishing for younger and older readers were not uncommon.

### Picture Book of the Year

MORIMOTO, Junko (illus.) Helen Smith (adapted by) *Kojiro and the bears* Collins. Visual Arts Board Award

The panel judged Junko Morimoto's outstanding contribution *Kojiro and the bears* to be an outright winner. The universality of theme, outstanding design and quality of illustrations, combine to create a statement of literary and artistic unity. Whilst not a book for younger readers, it was agreed that it could be interpreted on different levels and as such has made a significant contribution to the craft of the picture book.

### Honour Books

ZAK, Drabos (illus.) Judy Zavos (text) *Murgatroyd's garden* Heinemann. Visual Arts Board Award  
BASE, GRAEME *Animalia* Viking Kestrel. Visual Arts Board Award

*Murgatroyd's garden* in contrast, whilst supporting in every way the criteria for quality picture books, is a good fun situation and a delightful fantasy and cautionary tale. The slightly European-flavoured text and illustrations are a welcome diversion in Australia in 1987. Commended also is *Animalia*, the picture book wonder of the year, enjoying perhaps the widest audience of any shortlisted title and certainly a most creative alphabet book.

Reading Time, Vol 31 No 3, 1987

## Shortlist

VIVAS, Julie *The nativity* Omnibus  
GRAHAM, Bob *The wild* Lohian  
POWER, Margaret (illus.) Margaret Wild (text) *Creatures in the beard* Omnibus

Worthy of particular mention, and the panel felt possibly the most controversial picture book for 1987 is Julie Vivas' *The nativity*. A picture book of outstanding excellence, it is a refreshing interpretation of a well known story making a statement which has polarized her readers.

Bob Graham's wonderfully warm picture story *The wild*, reflects his preoccupation with families and pets, whilst making a firm statement on natural order, and adds to variety in this section. It is both warm-hearted and serious. Similarly the warmth and whimsical humour in *Creatures in the beard* was of sufficiently sound quality to be worthy of special mention.

Although not shortlisted the judges wished to note the artistic merit of Robert Ingpen's *The idle bears*. It was believed, however, that the whimsical and somewhat confused text was more attuned to a reminiscing adult reader.

## The Judges for 1987

Maurice Saxby — New South Wales  
Lynne Babbage — Australian Capital Territory  
Marie McGowan — Western Australia  
Fran Kelly — South Australia

Jo Goodman — Victoria  
Jenni Connor — Tasmania  
Robyn Collins — Queensland

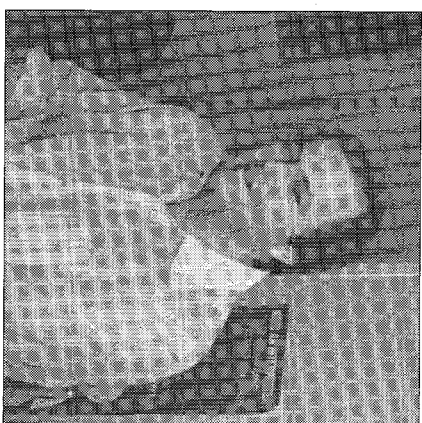
## WRITING ON WATER

by  
Michael Dugan

*Why write for children? Why write at all?* The answer to the second question is lost in the memories and myths of childhood. I wanted to be a writer almost from as early as I can remember, but the original spark that fired this ambition has been long forgotten. Environment no doubt had something to do with it; our house overflowed with books, my journalist father often wrote at home and my mother contributed occasional articles and poems to magazines and newspapers. All the family read voraciously.

Writing books for children was almost an accidental development. Most of my early writing was poetry and I had three slim volumes published and a couple of other books not intended for children before I responded to Anne Bower Ingram's suggestions that I collect a book of Australian nonsense verse. *Stuff and nonsense* (1974) was warmly received and sold very well. I had enjoyed writing my own contributions to it and continued to write nonsense verse — by now several books full.

Then, in 1975, an editor who had heard some radio programs I had written, asked if I would write a short novel for a paperback series for teenagers. I wasn't sure that I could, my fiction output at that time being only half a dozen short stories, but, remembering an incident from my own adolescence, I got an idea, built a story from it and wrote *Weekend* (1976)



And that's the answer to the first question. I write books for children because I get ideas for books for children and, once I have an idea I must work it out on paper or I become disgruntled and dissatisfied. At the moment I have two synopses for children's novels in a drawer, waiting until I free myself from a book I'm writing for adults, although, writing this, I feel that the distinction is unclear. The book I am writing for adult readers could, I feel be enjoyed by older children, just as I would hope that a children's novel like *Dingo boy* might be enjoyed by some adult readers.

As for *Melissa's ghost*, the ideas came, over time, during the drought year of 1982. My parents have retired to north-eastern Victoria and, during the drought, the well on their land achieved an unprecedented importance, allowing them to save much of the extensive garden they had planted.

Water was the topic of the year and it began to fascinate me, though probably not as much as it fascinated those whose livelihoods were dependent on it. While visiting my parents I talked to two local dowsers about their experiences and learnt, to my chagrin, that I was not possessed of their skill. I also became interested in wells, their construction and design.

The spark for *Melissa's ghost* came when my father and I walked down to a dam below their house to inspect its rapidly diminishing water level. He told me that a neighbour's young son had drowned there a few years before. That set me thinking about the two aspects of water — its essentiality in maintaining life; its treachery that can take life. I began to make notes for a story.

Behind my parents home is a cherry orchard that prompted the idea of Melissa and her parents great gamble in throwing up their city life to establish an orchard. The boy who drowned in the well gave me the idea for Richard, the still searching spirit of a boy drowned in a dam before the First World War. My newly acquired information about wells and water divining was put to use. The first draft came rapidly — too rapidly as it turned out — and was put aside for fifteen months while Jo Szwarc and I researched and wrote our book *There goes the neighbourhood! Australia's migrant experience* (1984) — a book for adults, but again I feel that many children might find something to enjoy in it! When I returned to *Melissa's ghost* I realised I had gone off track around the middle of the book and a lot of rewriting was required.