



BfK Briefing - July 2000

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NEWS

The Reading Relay <!--break-->

Children all over the country will be taking part in the Reading Relay, a massive summer reading challenge organised through the nation's public libraries. 4,700 public libraries will be inviting children to their local library to enrol in the first ever UK Reading Relay Team! They will receive their own special collector wallet and, as they borrow and read books over the summer, they will get record cards to store in their Relay wallet. On the back of each card they can record what they thought and felt about the book. To complete the challenge children must collect all six cards by the end of the summer holidays. On presenting their completed wallet, they receive their Reading Relay Certificate and Medal ? just like a real Olympiad! For further information contact your local library.

PRIZES

The Signal Poetry Award 2000

The winner of the Signal Poetry Award is Christopher Reid's **All Sorts** (Ondt & Gracehoper, 161 York Way, London N7 9LN, £7.50 post free, direct from the publisher). The judges (Peter Hollindale and Sophie Hannah) describe it as 'a miniature classic of children's poetry'. They continue: 'just about everything you would hope that poetry might offer to a child is to be found at some point in these fifty pages??

The Aventis Prize

The £10,000 Junior Prize in the Aventis Prize for Science Books has been won by Peter Bond's **DK Guide to Space**. It was voted for by students from 31 schools after the adult jury had selected a shortlist of six. Chair of judges, David Bellamy, described the book as a 'Marvel comic of a science book?.

The Branford Boase Award

The winner of the first ever Branford Boase Award is Katharine Roberts for **Song Quest** (Element). Roberts was presented with her £1,000 award for an outstanding first-time novel for children on 22 June. As well as celebrating a promising new writer in the field of children's books, the Branford Boase Award also celebrates the editor's role in identifying and nurturing new writers. Katharine Roberts and her editor, Barry Cunningham, each received a specially commissioned carved book based on Tony Ross's Branford Boase logo.

The Bisto Book of the Year Award

The winner of this year's Bisto Book of the Year Award (Ireland's most prestigious children's book award) is Marilyn

Taylor's **Faraway Home** (O'Brien Press). It is reviewed on p26 of this issue of **BfK**.

Scottish Arts Council Children's Book Awards

The winning titles were Debi Gliori's **Mr Bear's New Baby** (Orchard), Margaret Ryan and Priscilla Lamont's **The Queen's Birthday Hat** (Puffin), Richard Brassey and Stewart Ross's **The Story of Scotland** (Dolphin), Judith O'Neill's **Whirlwind** (Barrington Stoke) and Julie Bertagna's **Soundtrack** (Mammoth). The winning authors and illustrators received a total of £5,000.

Regional Prizes

The Angus Book Award

This year's Angus Book Award has been won by Tim Bowler's **Shadows** (Oxford University Press). The winner was chosen by third-year Angus school students who voted in a secret ballot. This is the second time that Bowler has won this award.

EVENTS

A World of Literacy is a day conference on Saturday 30 September for those interested in children, literacy and literature. Speakers include Gervase Phinn, Verna Wilkins, Philip Ridley and Viv Edwards. It takes place at the Reading and Language Information Centre, University of Reading. Details from RALIC (tel: 0118 931 8820, fax: 0118 931 6801).

Children's Literature International Summer School is being held from 30 July-13 August at the University of Surrey, Roehampton. It is not a conference but 'a concentrated period of study' during which delegates will participate in seminars and attend lectures. Themes will include interrogation of multiculturalism, work on children's literature in translation and the treatment of disability in children's books. Further information from NCRCL (tel: 020 8392 3008, fax: 020 8392 3819).

Planning Ahead: Revitalising the School Library

This residential conference for secondary school librarians is held from 18-20 October at Grantley Hall near Ripon. Speakers include Melvin Burgess, Rosie Rushton and Dave Wilkinson. Details from Catherine Dobson, North Yorkshire School Library Service, 21 Grammar School Lane, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL6 1DF (tel: 01609 776162).

OBITUARY

Diana Ross 1910-2000

Diana Ross's **Little Red Engine** series (see Classics in Short, p28) began as a goodnight story for her nephew who lived in a house above a railway cutting on a branch line. As a child she had told stories to her brother and sister and this awareness of the listener shaped her style, cf the memorable rendition of the noises of the trains ('chuffa chuffa chuff', 'dig-a-dig-dig'). Ross also wrote magical tales for older readers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

But is it literature?

Dear Editor

While I am in full agreement with Nicolette Jones (**BfK 122** , May 2000) that well-crafted children's books should not be dismissed merely because they are written 'for children', I would point out that if we are discussing the Whitbread Award then surely a book needs to be more than just well-crafted? **Harry Potter** is well-crafted. **Harry Potter** is enormous fun, **Harry Potter** is enormously successful. But literature he is not? Yet over the past year or so, mass market bestsellers which might quite reasonably be expected to walk off with the Smarties, the Sheffield, the Federation, have been appearing on shortlists such as, for example, the Guardian, the Whitbread, the Carnegie, all of which have hitherto been looked upon as awards for the more 'literary' type book.

This would never happen in the adult field (well, it hasn't to date) so why is it happening with children's books? Is it also happening in other countries, or is it a British phenomenon? And if so, what has brought it about? And furthermore, does it matter?

All theories welcome!

Jean Ure

Croydon

Powerful heroines

Dear Editor

Rosalind Kerven compresses a great deal into her article (**BfK** , May 2000) to answer the question 'are traditional tales blatantly sexist?' all of which is excellent. However, in saying 'even **The Arabian Nights** yields two unforgettably powerful heroines' (Shahrazad and Farizad) I think she sells that marathon masterpiece short. It is jam packed with heroic, powerful, stoical, wily, outrageous females, as well as many more 'conventional' types.

There are for example: The Princess who frees the man turned into an ape; the Warrior Princess Abrizah; Budur who roams the world to rescue Karamalazan; Maymunah the jinniah who almost destroys the disgusting Dahnash; Sympathy the Learned who confounds the mullahs; Yamlika, Queen of the Under Earth; Dalilah the Wily and her even wilier daughter Zaynab, who tames two regiments of police single handed; Zumurrud the slave girl who becomes a 'king'; Marjiana, the real force behind the story of Ali Baba; Zaina the Chick Pea Seller's Daughter, who re-educates the insolent Sultan's son; to say nothing of the Woman and her Five Suitors, the anonymous heroine, one among many tales with a whole book called 'The Wiles of Women', devoted to them. The whole point underlying the various stories in **The Thousand and One Nights** is that Shahrazad is teaching King Shahrayar that men neither can nor should seek to control women.

And one must not forget Sharazad's young sister Dunyazad who risks her life along with the storyteller.

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Broxbourne, Herts

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