



Editor's Page - November 1984

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Editorial

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News and comment from the Editor.

This year instead of getting swamped by Christmas we decided to feature some other celebrations. Hence **Festive Seasons** (p24). And then we heard about **The Box of Delights** (p16) and began choosing books for our eleven pages of reviews. I ended up convinced that what we should be celebrating is the marvellous artists we have in children's books. John Burningham (Authorgraph p14) never ceases to amaze and delight; **Granpa** is very special (p4). So is Jan Pienkowski's **Christmas**, the Christmas story with a text from the King James' bible. This must be one of the most beautifully designed books ever. The pages, decorated with flowers, plants and fruits, gleam with gold; among the stems small silhouette images echo the narrative in the larger pictures. The pictures are in the Central European fairy tale tradition which some may feel inappropriate; but for children it is arguably one way into wonder and the whole book is certainly nothing if not a celebration.

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Delights on the Box

John Masefield was born, he states 'in or near Ledbury, on or nearly on the first of June 1878.' At twenty, starting as a writer in London, he had already been in the Merchant Navy for four years and worked in a carpet mill in New York. Poet Laureate, novelist, dramatist, essayist and storyteller, when he came to write for children it was to Herefordshire that he turned; to landscapes and places he had absorbed with all the intensity of childhood, and to a time when in his imaginative life 'stories of some kind were going on... whenever I was alone.'

The Midnight Folk, the first of his two classic fantasies has been described by Margery Fisher as 'one of the best and happiest books ever written for children'. In it the poet, the storyteller and the child that was are - come together.' **The Box of Delights** (which arose from some idle speculation' about whether it would be possible to stop a cathedral service) is subtitled **When the Wolves were Running** and it is about good and evil.

Though acknowledged classics the stories are not well-known to children today. In 1943 **The Box of Delights** was serialised on radio. In 1961 the same adaptor and producer tackled **The Midnight Folk**. Will Paul Stone follow suit? (p16). On each occasion the books found new readers. If TV has the same effect those readers will find new versions neatly abridged by Patricia Crampton (p17).

A Triumphant Cover

Would John Masefield approve of television - using his stories? He was deeply concerned to preserve, enrich and expand the art of storytelling; he was interested' in how stories, dance, music and painting could come' together. Somehow I don't think he would have scorned the electronic medium. I think he would certainly like Faith Jaques' illustrations for **The Box of Delights**, especially the one on our cover.

Faith Jaques is an illustrator of great distinction. Her black and white drawings illustrate stories by, among others, Leon Garfield, Gwen Grant, Phillipa Pearce; and are a model of their kind. She says, 'I regard myself as an interpretative illustrator: the last thing I want to do is impose myself too strongly on the text, which for me is sacrosanct.' At one time she claimed to find producing black and white drawings more demanding than a picture book; but when in 1979 she produced her own first picture book, **Tilly's House** it was acclaimed as an 'instant classic'.

Classic Centenary

This year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of another author of classic children's books who began writing in the 30's (and one who has been illustrated by Faith Jaques). On the night of December 17th 1884 Alice Jane Taylor was born in the Derbyshire farmhouse that had been her family's home for generations. Later she described the event: -

'So I was born in this wild storm, with deep snow on the ground and cattle shut in their houses and horses in the stable. I was bathed - in spring water heated over the fire, and I was held up to the window to open my eyes and to look out over the fields at the dazzling whiteness and to look at the candles in their brass candlesticks alight to welcome me.'

It is, of course Alison Uttley who, like John Masefield, drew so much on her childhood in her writing. She grew up in Derbyshire, attended the village school leaving eventually to go to Manchester University where she took a degree in Physics. It was only years later when her husband died leaving her with a little son that *she* began to write. She died in 1976 at the age of ninety-one.

To mark her centenary Faber have published two new selections from her work. **Foxglove Tales**, stories for younger children, with delightful illustrations by Shirley Felts (0 571 13354 1, £4.95) and **Country World**, a selection from her autobiographical writings - with some of the original illustrations by C.J. Tunnicliffe, one of the greatest of all black and white illustrators (0 571 13328 2, £8.95). The quotation above is from **The Snow-baby** which is included in the book.

Seasonal Stories

Kathleen Lines' selection of Alison Uttley's tales, **Stories for Christmas** (Puffin) has been a seasonal standby for years. This year there are some new paperbacks to add to the collection. Gabrielle Vincent's **Merry Christmas Ernest and Celestine** (Picture Lion, 0 00 662382 4, £1.25) is a must for all under 7's; Steven Kroll and Tomie da Paola's **Santa's Crash-Bang Christmas** (Pocket Bears 0 907144 67 5, £1.50) introduces a clumsy, absent-minded Father Christmas - good for early readers; Rumer Godden's **The Fairy Doll** (Magnet, 0 416 45850 5, £1.25) is about four year-old Elizabeth and the Christmas tree fairy. If you are looking for a story to touch the imaginations of all ages then **The Magic Saddle** by Christobel Mattingly and Patricia Mullins (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 36421 1, £1.95) is the one.

It's a full-size picture book with beautifully evocative pictures and tells of Jonni who longed for a rocking horse for Christmas but whose parents could only afford one made of gingerbread. For the new year get James Stevenson's funny and heart-warming **The Night After Christmas** (Picture Lion, 0 00 662292 5, £1.25) about two toys *who* get thrown out to make room for new Christmas presents. And I must mention Jill Bennett's new compilation **The Christmas Book** with pictures by Peter Stevenson (Hippo, 0 590 70344 7, £1.75) - stories, poems, ideas, activities which will take you happily up to the end of term.

Have Book ...

Christmas is traditionally a time for sharing stories. Jim Trelease has been spreading the read-aloud message this autumn and his **Read Aloud Handbook** (Puffin £2.50) makes interesting reading, even if his all American experience doesn't find a perfect match here. The 'Treasury' of recommended books (edited for this country by Jill Bennett) is right on target. One book not on the list because it has only just been published is **Woman in the Moon and other tales of forgotten heroines**, collected and retold by James Riordan and beautifully presented with illustrations by Angela Barrett (Hutchinson, 0 09 156760 2, £5.95) I suppose there's a chance it might never have been published if it hadn't

been for **Books for Keeps**. In **BfK** 16, writing about folk and fairy tales, Jim referred to his own unpublished collection of 'feminist' folk tales. Hutchinson contacted him and, behold two years later a beautiful book. Congratulations, Jim, it was worth waiting for and it's on the shortlist for the Emil award.

Happy celebrating (of whatever kind) to everyone, from all of us.

Pat

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