



Editor's Page ? May 1987

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Editorial

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News and comment from the Editor.

'What?' do I hear you ask. 'No Pat?'

Relax, gentle reader. The unfamiliar face at the head of this piece doesn't signify blood in the boardroom at **Books for Keeps** nor is That Man Murdoch muscling in on the Kid Lit scene. The take-over is entirely temporary. As announced in her last editorial, Pat Triggs is stepping down for one issue only to concentrate on BfK's Guide to Children's Poetry due later this year. Normal service returns to the magazine in July... with not too many pieces for Pat to pick up, I hope.

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This issue concentrates on picture-books. Whether or not we're enjoying a second Golden Age of Children's Literature as we're sometimes told, there can be no doubt at all that illustration for children has never been more plentiful, more varied or more accomplished in both technique and production. Mind you, it has to be. As Jan Pienkowski once pointed out, children these days encounter more visual pzazz in one commercial-break on television than most middle-aged adults experienced throughout their entire childhood. Does this mean illustration today is *better* than ever before, though'?

The Caldecott Tradition

That's a very different question. And who better to pose it, and nudge towards an answer, than Brian Alderson? His dissent from the notion that 'promotion is all that matters in the euphoric world of children's books' is well known and in his article 'The Flow of the Images' (see page 4) we're reminded as powerfully as ever that what we should be engaged in is the 'aiding and abetting of a *critical* enterprise' in which text and illustration are seen, or not seen, to be working together. Central to Brian Alderson's case is the work of the nineteenth-century illustrator, Randolph Caldecott, in comparison with whom Errol Le Cain, for instance, is a mere 'decorative artist' and Anthony Browne 'a clever-clever technician'.

Well, maybe. Assessment Alderson-style is neither dull nor lacking in depth so you'll need all your wits about you to disagree. You may also need our Authorgraph (page 16) which takes Anthony Browne as its subject, an exploration of the approach and motivation of an illustrator whose appeal for me goes well beyond that distinctive and disturbing surface style. His **Hansel and Gretel**, first published in 1981 but in Magnet paperback only last year, is as good an example as I can cite of the way in which pictures can shift our perception of a well-known story. On this Nicholas Tucker is an expert. In 'When the Kipling Had to Stop' (page 24) he explores the fate of the **Just So Stories**, recently out-of-copyright and thus liable to be buried under an avalanche of illustrative alternatives. Is that what's happened, though? Read his account for a far from depressing view.

The Return of Mother Goose

Sally Grindley, on the other hand, might have called her piece 'When Mother Goose Had to Re-start'. On page 15 she

reports on the deliberations behind this year's Mother Goose Award for The Most Exciting Newcomer to British Children's Book Illustration. Last year, you may recall, the panel failed to find a winner for the first time since the award began in 1979. This year's panel, which included Charles Keeping, Colin McNaughton, Lisa Kopper and, yes, Anthony Browne, was luckier. The 1987 bronze egg goes to Patrick James Lynch who made his debut illustrating Alan Garner's **A Bag of Moonshine** (Collins) and joins a list of distinguished former winners like Michelle Cartlidge, Reg Cartwright, Juan Wijngaard and Jan Ormerod ... not to mention Satoshi Kitamura, Patrick Benson and Susan Varley. What makes the Mother Goose Award so special, as its sponsors Books for Children are well aware, is the encouragement it gives young illustrators at the outset of their career.

So watch out for Patrick James Lynch.

Re-animating Remus

Watch out, too, for Jerry Pinkney. He's far from being a newcomer - remember his illustrations for Valerie Flournoy's **The Patchwork Quilt** published a couple of years ago by Bodley Head? Till now, though, he's been much better known in his native America than in Britain. That could be about to change. See page 30 for a review of **Half a Moon** and **One Whole Star** where he makes wonderful use of some distinctly mediocre verse by Crescent Dragonwagon. But for a glimpse of the full power of Pinkney turn to our front-cover. It comes from **The Tales of Uncle Remus**. Joel Chandler Harris's famous Brer Rabbit adventures, re-told by Julius Lester, with Pinkney's colour-plate and black-and-white drawings inviting comparison with the Frost originals. According to Julius Lester's introduction these stories represent 'the largest single collection of Afro-American folk-tales ever collected and published. Their place and importance in Afro-American culture is singular and undisputed' - despite, that is, their dubious provenance as the product of a white man very much of his time. Now that the stories have been re-claimed by two black men very much of their time, we asked Stephanie Nettell to discuss the project with both of them (see 'Rehabilitating That Rabbit' on page 12). Amongst much else, she discovered that Lester and Pinkney had never in fact met nor felt any great need to do so. The manuscript was link enough, apparently. Given the current fashion for close author-illustrator collaboration, at any rate with books for younger readers, it's an apt reminder that very different modes of perception are involved. We'll see the outcome next month when the book is published by Bodley Head.

Putting a Picture-book to Work

As usual, this issue also reviews the latest paperbacks across the age-range, together with a special review of Spring picture-books in hardback. The importance of picture-books for older children is now well established thanks to pioneers like Elaine Moss. They're far more than a mere aid-to-literacy, often enough representing the only sustained encounter children have with visual art out to sell only itself. Do picture-books have other curriculum possibilities, though? For details about a recent initiative in a Hampshire middle school, read Andy Chapell and Louise Fitzpatrick on pages 9 and 10. They were a bit diffident about writing it up for a wider audience but we think it's well worth reporting - and emulating.

And that's about it. Well, almost. Let me finish with Julius Lester's **Do Lord Remember Me** from Dent (0 460 04720 5, £9.95). Yes, I know it isn't a picture-book, nor is it for children. However, even a novice editor has some privileges and I can't pass up the chance to recommend a novel that under the guise of describing the last day alive of an elderly preacher sums up a century-and-a-half of black experience in America from slavery to civil rights. By the end, you feel as close to the South as Brer Rabbit did to the briar-patch where he was 'bred en born'. Don't miss it.,

My thanks to all reviewers and contributors in the following pages - also to Angie Hill, Richard Hill and Jan Powling for providing the sort of back-up which tactfully became front-up when I got into difficulties. Welcome back, Pat!

Chris

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