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Views and Reviews: Children's Literature

By Jane Bingham

Spring is an exciting season because it is the "time of the singing of birds," but it is also exciting because it is the time of the announcing of highly coveted children's book awards. This year's winner of the prestigious Newbery Award for the "most distinguished literature" for children is Robert C. O'Brien for *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (Atheneum). Honor books include: *Incidents at Hawk's Hill* by Allan W. Eckert (Little); *The Planet of Junior Brown* by Virginia Hamilton (Macmillan); *The Tombs of Stuan* by Ursula K. Le Guin (Atheneum); *Annie and the Old One* by Miska Miles (Atlantic-Little); *The Headless Cupid* by Silpha K. Snyder (Atheneum).

This year's winner of the coveted Caldecott Award for the best picture book is Nonny Hogrogian for *One Fine Day* (Macmillan). Honor books include: *If All the Seas Were One Sea* illustrated by Janina Domanska (Macmillan); *Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book* illustrated by Tom Feelings, written by Muriel L. Feelings (Dial); *Hildilid's Night* illustrated by Arnold Lobel, written by Cheli Duran Ryan (Macmillan).

The winner of the National Book Award for Children's Books is Donald Barthelme for *The Slightly Irregular Fire Engine, or the Hithering Thithering Djinn*.

Summer, in theory at least, brings leisure hours. Hopefully, some of this leisure for both you and your pupils will be devoted to reading for sheer pleasure. If you have been successful in stimulating your pupils to read on their own, you might suggest some recent books to them.

For younger readers, Osmond Molarsky's *Take It or Leave It* (a humorous, easily read story with clever illustrations of urban life);

Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad Are Friends* (last year's runner-up for the Caldecott Award, an I-Can-Read-Book, which is perfectly delightful); Evelyn Shaw's *Octopus* (a science I-Can-Read-Book with simple and rhythmic text); Judith Viorst's *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (a slightly more difficult book but one that handles the subject of death honestly and simply enough for most young readers to understand); Ashley Bryan's *The Ox of the Wonderful Horns and Other African Folk Tales* (four short stories illustrated with bold, attractive woodcuts).

For more advanced readers, Bo Carpelan's *Bow Island; The Story of a Summer That Was Different* (translated from the Swedish, winner of the Nils Holgersson Prize); John D. Fitzgerald's *Me and My Little Brain* (illustrated by Mercer Mayer, the latest book of the author's first person narratives, a humorous, suspenseful sequel to *The Great Brain* and *More Adventures of the Great Brain*); Astrid Lindgren's *Emil's Pranks* (a sequel to *Emil and the Soup Toureen* by the author of the famous Pippi Longstocking books); Browning Norton's *Johnny/Bingo* (a story about a black boy and a white boy who encounter criminals and hostages, but manage exciting escapes).

For your own summer reading pleasure, there are many fine adult books about children's literature that are worth your attention.

Joan Bodger's *How the Heather Looks* is a charming account of her literary travels throughout England. Traveling with two children had its difficulties, but the delights far outweighed the problems. Her account of their trip to the Beatrix Potter country is especially heart-warming. Their visit to Kenneth Grahame's

River and her telling of how they traced the adventure of the four friends in *The Wind in the Willows* is a special joy to Grahame enthusiasts.

Eleanor Cameron's *The Green and Burning Tree* is a series of essays on the meaning of fantasy and its role in the development of the human imagination. Miss Cameron is one of those rare people who can write children's fantasy books of great worth (*Stowaway to the Mushroom Planet* series) and also write highly intelligent commentary on the making of fantasies for children. She is an equally competent creator and critic.

Shelia Egoff's *Only Connect* is a collection of essays of some of the finest critics, authors, and illustrators of children's books. The essays, which are on varied subjects and reflect many philosophies, are all competently written and thought-provoking.

Two older biographies of note are Margaret Lane's *The Tale of Beatrix Potter* and Monica Stirling's *The Wild Swan* (a life of Hans Christian Andersen.) An interesting recent "autobiographical fragment" of the life of an important illustrator is *The Young Ardizzone*.

Two new children's literature textbooks worth your perusal are Mary Ann Nelson's *A Comparative Anthology of Children's Literature* and Anderson and Groff's *A New Look at Children's Literature*. A new and welcome edition (the 4th) of the well-known Arbuthnot's *Children and Books* has also been published. The revision was done by Zena Sutherland.

In your summer travels, you may want to visit some of the special children's collections in various li-

braries. Some of the collections are made up of rare books, first editions, books of historical significance such as hornbooks and battledores, toy books and early textbooks; other collections specialize in artists' original illustrations, authors' original manuscripts, and other memorabilia. Still other collections contain extensive representation of ethnic literature.

Some collections you might like to see are:

In Worcester, Massachusetts — Exhibit of American Children's Books Printed Before 1900;

In Boston Public Library — Early Children's Books;

In the New York Public Library — Children's Books of Yesterday;

In the Philadelphia Free Library — Children's Books (rare, first editions, special collections of the work of Greenaway, Potter, Rackham, Pyle, Frost);

In Washington's District of Columbia Library — Exhibit in the Children's Department, emphasizing illustrators; large collection of 18th and 19th century children's books);

In the Toronto, Ontario Library — The Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books;

Right here in Michigan, we are fortunate to have a fine, new collection of rare children's books in The Lucille Clarke Memorial Collection at Central Michigan University at Mt. Pleasant.

I would enjoy very much to hear from you and learn about your summer literary travels or your summer reading experiences with children. Write to me at: 503 Varner Hall, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan, 48063.

(Jane Bingham is an Assistant Professor at Oakland University.)