



The Hans Christian Andersen Award

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Article Category:

Awards

Byline:

Patricia Crampton writes about judging an international award.

In 1953 Erich Kastner, Astrid Lindgren and P. L. Travers joined with the late Jella Lepman, founder of the International Youth Library in Munich, to launch the **International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY)** 'to promote international understanding through children's books'.

In 1954 IBBY initiated the Hans Christian Andersen Award, presented every two years to the best children's writer selected by an international jury. An award for an illustrator was added soon after.

Patricia Crampton served as a member of that jury in 1976 and 1978 and this year is its President. Here she writes about some of the problems of making an international award.

In 1976 I truly believed that making a children's book award was one of those idyllic exercises to which international (i.e. political) bias did not apply. That naive idea was soon shattered. I was shocked too into a new awareness of the pigeon-holing we are all guilty of and the relatively limited outlook we all had on the literature of other nations. That year the British section of IBBY had nominated William Mayne and Edward Ardizzone for the award. Mayne was dismissed by the other jurors as being 'so typically English' that his understatements remained underground: Ardizzone was 'always the same and very unexciting. Openmouthed. I found myself presented with a pair of earrings by one juror: later others told me they too had received appropriate gifts from the same source. My eyes had been opened. and but for my husband's solid presence, I think my spirits would have sunk beyond recall. The winners, however, were both excellent: Cecil Bodker and Tatiana Mavrina (USSR). But it was quite obvious that to the Western part of the world 'folkloric' art had ceased to appeal - the kind of cultural gap which makes international jury work difficult.

One of the biggest problems in serving on the international jury is Getting the Books. We receive an average of 10 books by each nominee and there are usually about 32 nominations - 320 books. The jury meets in April, so we hope to start repossessing the books in the previous September - little enough time one would think. Inevitably the ideal is not achieved. 1978 provides a classic illustration. The Russian juror did not receive the works of Alan Garner and Charles Keeping, all despatched in good time, until long after the meeting had taken place. The work of the internationally popular Janusz Stanny reached scarcely any jurors and was reluctantly dropped from the list. The Spanish nominees decided on air freight as their method of despatch: jurors found themselves with invitations from Customs to come and pay for the release of the books at the airport. When claimed the books turned out to be only those of the author nominee, the illustrator's never arrived anywhere.

The host country for the judging does its best to make the books of all competitors available from library and embassy stocks.

Helpful though this is when only one or two jurors have not seen the books, it cannot compensate for non-receipt by the whole jury, nor for the mature consideration possible over several months. This year I received my last batch in January, an achievement in itself and the first time to my knowledge that all jurors have received all the books.

In 1978 the jury met in Tehran, shortly before the revolution. Another kind of problem faced us when three jurors were prevented from arriving, leaving us with only seven votes out of ten and without the representatives of three languages. The absence of even one juror on an international jury is important because our range is in any case not wide enough to cover all the cultures and languages involved. We have been particularly conscious of the lack of a juror from the Far East, not only for their sake - none of us even knows Japanese - but for ours: we need to learn about the Asian view of *our* children's books.

The Andersen jury, in my experience, is both serious and warm-hearted. Both virtues can become a liability. I remember the long discussion of the work of a rather mediocre Austrian writer who in one book tackled the Irish troubles as they affect England.

Simply because this is a serious subject our jury spent ages deciding how heavily the mediocrity and inaccuracy of the book weighed against the desirability of commending the subject matter. Some even thought that incorrect information was better than none! In 1978 a book about Lapland by a French writer came in for much discussion.

Our warm-hearted jury thought Lapland had been neglected in children's literature and the book should therefore be considered very seriously (it was rather a good book in fact). Luckily the absent juror, Kaija Salonem, had sent notes and it appeared that, though an excellent piece of literature, the book had nothing to do with Lapland!

So what is 'fair'? Should we stick to excellence as the first criterion'. (I think that in fairness, ultimately, to all children we should.) Or should we to some extent at least cause the award to move around as a sort of congratulation for progress or to show our sympathy for effort (not the same thing!') Should we broaden the scope of the awards?

And what can we do about the language problem?' This year, well in advance of our meeting, I have written to jurors suggesting that, for the languages they do not know, they find two experts: one of their own nationality, one with the same nationality as the nominated writer. let's say Japanese, both of whom speak both languages. The one sharing their own language can help to produce a comparative criticism of the books. the other can provide useful information about the contribution made by the writer in question to Japanese children's literature. This is not easy to achieve. Why should busy people give up their time reading ten children's books for free' But at least it is worth aiming at.

A response to my request to jurors to begin with discussion of criteria in advance of the meeting has come from Maurice Saxby of Australia who writes: 'With Ana Maria Machado, I believe that a writer's award should value 'the literary quality of the text but then I have listened to earnest- debates as to what constitutes literary merit. I believe that literature explores, with integrity, some area of human experience ... in James Joyce's words, the work should have 'unity, harmony and radiance'...'

Other phrases from other jurors in the past remain with me. Of Paula Fox, 'a child can grow with every book': of Alan Garner, 'for these three pearls alone (the Stone Book sequence) he would deserve the prize'. (A language problem overcome there - the juror was Iranian.) and 'the books must open a window for the child'.

Looking back, with all the problems, the results we arrived at seem valid. Just sometimes it is difficult to understand how we did it.

IBBY

In October last year IBBY celebrated its 30th year of existence. There are now National Sections in 49 countries and Individual Members in a further 8 countries and territories.

As well as being a constant focus for international opinion and information on children and books, IBBY organises an international conference every two years. The papers and proceedings of the 18th Congress, held in Cambridge in 1982, **Story in a Child's Changing World**, are available from Colin Ray, Tan-y-Capel, Bont Dolgadfan, Llanbryn-mair, Powys SY19 7BB, £5.25 post free. (Well worth having.)

IBBY also carries out projects; notably at the moment research into books for handicapped children and fundraising for the IBBY Third World Book Fund.

Patricia Crampton, a distinguished translator of children's books and an active member of British IBBY, has written an **Introduction to the History and Work of IBBY**, available, post free, from Robert Leeson, 18 McKenzie Road, Broxbourne, Herts EN10 7JH, 65p.

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