



Editorial - January 2004

Article Author:

[Rosemary Stones](#) [1]

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News and comment from the Editor.

For the 58 years of the Arts Council's existence children's literature has managed to soldier on without the benefit of its input. <!--break-->A consultation paper on children's literature, **From Looking Glass to Spyglass**, has now been published. The sparkiness of its title promises well but does not protect the reader from the banality unfortunately characteristic of such productions, viz: 'Childhood is not just a preparation for life, but part of it, and children's development in reading clearly doesn't happen in a vacuum, independently of their development or experience elsewhere.' Astonishingly, the paper makes no mention at all of the impact of the internet and I can only imagine the righteous steam coming out of the ears of, amongst others, Michael Thorn of the Achuka website.

Emphasis is rightly given to the place of children's literature in the education of teachers and to the need to nurture and develop the talents of new children's writers and illustrators, including those from minority groups. But, as with many of the other undisputed pieties included here, this paper seems incapable of thinking through how and why such things might be brought about. Thus, despite 'the sheer plenitude of children's books' which can be 'overwhelming' (10,519 new titles in 2002), we are told there is a need for more books in translation. The grounds cited are that Aidan Chambers and Philip Pullman hold this view. Perhaps we deserve a more substantive argument.

The consultation paper's paragraph on the role of review magazines is both bland and meagre. It fails to place them (together with literary prizes, other forms of reviewing, etc) as part of the wider critical debate around children's literature which serves, crucially, to encourage high standards in writing and publishing as well as to disseminate information about what is published. One of the most significant ways in which talent is nurtured is critical feedback in the form of independent, intelligent and well informed debate. Knowledge of children's books underpins every aspect of the process which brings child and book together. Debate and the dissemination of knowledge are the core functions of review magazines such as this one.

Illustration workshop

Books for Keeps is delighted to be working in association with the Quentin Blake Gallery of Illustration and The Learning Centre at Somerset House, London, on a one-day seminar and workshop for teachers, librarians and children's book reviewers to explore ways of discussing and writing about the visual aspect of children's books. This will be a wonderful opportunity to meet and share ideas as well as to learn from Quentin Blake and other specialists. Further details on page 15.

From Looking Glass to Spyglass (0 7287 0986 4) is published by the Arts Council England and can be ordered from Marston Books Services (01235 465500; directorders@marston.co.uk [3]) or it can be downloaded at

www.artscouncil.org.uk [4]



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