



# Awards

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[Rosemary Stones](#) [1]

Article Author:

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**Rosemary Stones** looks back over 13 years of the Other Award, **Chris Powling** reports on this year's Emil Award.

## 13 OTHER YEARS: THE OTHER AWARD 1975-1987

**Rosemary Stones**, co-founder of the Award, looks back

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It's important to remember that in 1975 books with active, enterprising girls, books in First Languages or books which presented the authentic Black British or ordinary state school experience were both few and far between and hard to find if you were not a children's book specialist. As members of Children's Rights Workshop, Andrew Mann and I were meeting Black parents' groups, groups on estates campaigning around play provision, children on Travellers' sites and so forth. We were made keenly aware of the gulf between the world as depicted in children's literature and the variety and richness of all those other worlds whose existence and validity were not being acknowledged in books.

Alongside our campaigning work on children's books, we wanted to do something positive, something that would draw attention to new or neglected work from children's writers and illustrators who were reaching the parts not usually reached. An Award - the singling out for praise and attention of progressive books-seemed to us to be a flamboyant and entertaining way both to promote new kinds of writing for children and focus critical attention on 'other' concerns.

We assembled a panel; together we evolved criteria and each year published a press release and held a public meeting at which our 'winners' were invited to speak about their books and our audience to question them and us, the panel. As the Award developed, we added more panel members, refined our criteria to take in such issues as books for and about children with disabilities, and published a poster featuring our 'winning' titles. The word 'winners' is necessarily in quotes as we in fact offered no prize other than the glory of winning. (Recipients of the Other Award were remarkably good-humoured about the absence of a cheque.)

The proof of the pudding is in the eating and, looking back over 13 years' worth of Other Award winners (we awarded three or four books each year), I think we picked them.

Some of our winners can now be seen to be pioneering examples of educational books whose approach is these days firmly established. I think of such titles as Mary Waterson's **Gypsy Family** (A & C Black), a photo-story book about a Traveller family; Basil Davidson's first non-colonialist history of Africa, *Discovering Africa's Past* (Longman); Peter Heaslip's **Terraced House** and **Next Door** books (Methuen) which reflect the everyday experience of Primary children; Angela V John's **Coalmining Women** (Cambridge Educational) which focused on women's history; and David McDowell's **The Palestinians** (Franklin Watts), an exceptionally clear account of the history and present-day situation of this dispossessed nation.

We also picked novels of enduring significance - Susan Price's **Twopence a Tub** (Faber) about the Dudley miners' first strike; Farrukh Dhondy's **East End at Your Feet** (Macmillan Topliner) and **Come to Mecca** (Lions) with their multi-racial inner London settings; Gene Kemp's **The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler** (Faber) with its good humoured gender twist; James Watson's powerful **Talking in Whispers** (Gollancz) about Chile after Allende; Beverley Naidoo's moving **Journey to Jo'Burg** (Longman Knockouts/Lions) about the children of South Africa; and Timothy Ireland's **Who Lies Inside** (GMP) in which a sixth-former comes to realise and accept that he is gay. Such Other Award winners (and there is no space to list them all) are works of lasting literary quality which also address the preoccupations, issues and concerns of our times.

For younger readers we chose Shirley Hughes' **Helpers** (Bodley Head) which broke new ground with its working Mum and male baby-sitter; John Agard's lively **Say It Again, Granny** (Bodley Head) with its dialect poetry; and the Peckham Publishing Project's **Our Kids** which showed how community publishing could serve as a vehicle for local creativity and interests.

There were also those books which got away. Every award must impose restrictions of some kind on entry but, with hindsight, I feel that the Other Award was ill-equipped to respond to innovative illustration - Errol Lloyd and Lisa Kopper are two notable non-winners whose pioneering contributions reflect Other Award concerns. But if we didn't get it right all the time (and I can think of other omissions), I believe we got it right enough of the time to make a useful, provocative and stimulating contribution to debate around children's literature.

Why then kill off the Other Award? A primary reason is that to continue to develop and respond to public interest, the Other Award would have to seek sponsorship - an award privately funded and managed by two individuals on a shoestring cannot meet the publicity and marketing needs of a literary award in the thrusting eighties. We don't want to go down this road. The second reason is that we no longer think an award is an appropriate way to promote 'other' concerns. In 1975 the Other Award was established as an irritant and counter to the Carnegie, the Kate Greenaway and the Guardian awards. In these Smarties days, it's hard enough to see the books for the plethora of awards getting in the way.

So, after 13 years, we end the Other Award - not because all the 'other' battles have been won but because it's time to think of new and imaginative ways of winning them.

The members of the Other Award panel *were*:

**Peter Griffiths**, Education Officer, Thames Television

**Grace Hallworth**, storyteller

**Mary Hoffman**, children's book reviewer and writer

**Robert Leeson**, children's book writer and critic

**Andrew Mann**, Co-ordinator, South Bank Family Rights

**Barbara McKellar**, Lecturer in Education, South Bank Polytechnic

**Rosemary Stones**, children's book critic

**John Vincent**, Principal Librarian, London Borough of Lambeth

Former Other Award panel members: **Cecilia Gordon**, **Ziggi Alexander**.

The Other Award would like to thank **Books for Keeps** for its consistent support and coverage over the years.

**Rosemary Stones** is now Senior Editor for the Lions imprint at Collins. Her own latest book is **Some Day My Prince Won't Come: More Stories for Young Feminists**

published by Piccadilly Press (1 85340 021 1, £6.50).

## THE EMIL AWARD

**Chris Powling**, one of the judges, on this year's Emil Award, announced this month

The trouble with foregone conclusions is that everyone of integrity feels a fierce need to combat any hint of a put-up job. So Elaine Moss, Margaret Meek, Tom Maschler and I spent an inordinate amount of time *resisting* mention of the book that - as it transpired afterwards - we all knew in our heart of hearts was the best 'matching of text and illustration' we'd come across in 1988. As with **The Jolly Postman**, our 1986 winner, we found ourselves behaving like four cardsharps with sleeves assiduously concealing the same ace.

And, as in 1986, this is no comment at all on the quality of the rest of the entry - on the contrary it struck each of us as better than usual. Though this year certainly threw up a record number of entries it would be polite to call 'speculative', it also brought an exceptional bunching of front-runners. We admitted to great difficulty in whittling down to seven or eight titles the books we felt worth discussing at our final meeting . . . books that in almost any other year would have been potential winners.

Take **Can It Be True?**, for instance. Fair enough, this won't appeal to everybody but who can deny the sheer *stylishness* of Susan Hill's words and Angela Barrett's decorations'? Similarly, Colin McNaughton's text for **Jolly Roger** may sprawl a little too much for some tastes but criticism of it virtually comes to (Mc)naught when account is taken of those inventive, varied, comicbook-on-tiptoe pictures. Both are very much the kind of near-misses that end up defining the bullseye. So, too, is **The Mighty Slide** with Allan Ahlberg spreading his verse, more extensively than is his habit, across five stories superbly pointed up by Charlotte Voake. Her black-and-white vignettes have the sort of sharpness and flair that makes most full-colour jobs look pallid. And what about **Black Beauty**? Has the late Charles Keeping ever been better - even when winning last year with Charles Causley's **Jack the Treacle Eater**? To top off the almost-but-not-quitely, we were enchanted with Martin Waddell's superbly judged, bedtime narrative, **Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?**, wonderfully complemented by Barbara Firth with pictures so fresh, witty and gentle they deserved, and got, the very best of canny Walker designerliness. Just about a perfect picture book, in fact.

Which makes all the more astonishing our unanimous winner-by-acclaim, **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**, as interpreted by Anthony Browne. This will come as no surprise to regular readers of **Books for Keeps**, of course. They got an advance glimpse of what was in store 18 months ago in our May 1987 Authorgraph which ended with the prediction, 'what better stimulus could there be for the quirky, arresting talent of Anthony Browne than Lewis Carroll's **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**?' No-one, though, could have anticipated just how propitious this pairing would turn out to be. Anthony's Alice, we feel, is pretty nearly definitive. For us the question is not so much 'is this as good as the original version by Sir John Tenniel?' as 'is this even *better* than Tenniel?' You don't believe us? Well, it's a comparison every **Alice** admirer must follow through for themselves since in our view these sharp, funny, gloriously surreal yet admirably restrained pictures will bear the closest scrutiny. And if you're *not* an Alice admirer, turn to page 28 of this issue for an entirely coincidental endorsement by Bernard Ashley. I was never an **Alice-in-Wonderland** fan,' says Bernard, 'it was all too whimsical and clever for me.' Until this version, it seems. Bernard's response, the Emil panel is pretty sure, will be shared by umpteen others.

**Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**, Lewis Carroll, ill. Anthony Browne, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 324 1, £12.95

**Can It Be True?**, Susan Hill, ill. Angela Barrett, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12155 8, £6.95

**Jolly Roger**, Colin McNaughton, Walker, 0 7445 101 1 2, £8.95

**The Mighty Slide**, Allan Ahlberg, ill. Charlotte Voake, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 81677 9, £5.95

**Black Beauty**, Anna Sewell, ill. Charles Keeping, Gollancz, 0 575 03924 8, £8.95

**Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?**, Martin Waddell, ill. Barbara Firth, Walker, 0 7445 0796 0, £6.95

The Kurt Maschler Award, established in 1982 in memory of Erich Kastner and Walter Trier (the author and illustrator of **Emil and the Detectives**), is now most frequently referred to as 'the Emil' with reference to the bronze statuette of Emil which is given as part of the prize. The award is given for 'a work of imagination in the children's field in which text and illustration are of excellence and so presented that each enhances and yet balances the other'.

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