



Editor's Page - January 1989

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Article Category:

Editorial

Byline:

News and comment from the Editor.

Happy New Year. It's good to be back in the Editor's chair, <!--break-->though I can't pretend I didn't enjoy my sabbatical - not least for the pleasure of reading the last four issues of **BfK** so ably edited by Richard and Chris. Being in the USA for the first time was constantly absorbing, particularly being in schools and universities. But there's no doubt that a high spot of the visit was going to the annual conference of the American Library Association (ALA) in New Orleans. Imagine 16,000 delegates, a conference programme the size of a telephone directory setting out 2,000 sessions, 1,000 exhibitors, a page of acronyms - expression of the amazing organisation and influence of ALA and its sub-groups. I plotted my course through four days of children's book events - award ceremonies, sessions on selection, intellectual freedom, Out reach to pre-schoolers and parents, teenage reading, and ... and ... I noted the provision of Day Care for children, signing for the deaf, an amazing feat of organisation, and turned into the exhibition. In the Children's Books sections, librarians descended on piles of posters like locusts; publishers -topline editors as well as publicity people-smiled and kept the supplies coming. There were authors everywhere. British as well as American. Allan Ahlberg sat for hours signing copies of **Starting School**, Leon Garfield and Vivien Alcock answered streams of questions from formidably enthusiastic librarians. I enjoyed putting faces to names and discovering many writers not so far published here - though the presence of a small posse of British editors might change that.

S E Hinton - a winner

A major theme of this issue is Teenage Books - what in the USA they call Young Adult. This year the YASD (Young Adult Services Division of ALA) got together with **School Library Journal** to present an award to an author 'whose book or books over a period of time have been accepted by young adults as an authentic voice that continues to illuminate their experiences and emotions, giving insight into their lives'. Librarian Susan Tait, who chairs the award committee, believes the books highlighted by the award will enable young adults to better understand 'themselves, the world in which they live, and their relationship with others and with society'. First recipient of the bi-annual award and the \$1,000 gift that goes with it was S E Hinton, whose **The Outsiders** (1967) is still very much top of the pops. It's nearly ten years since **Tex** - time taken up by film versions of the books, and another kind of production. Susan Hinton explained. 'I seem to produce a book about every four years, but four years ago I had a baby instead.' **Taming the Star Runner**, published here by Gollancz in March, restarts the cycle. Its hero, Travis, is another 'outsider' but he's also a secret writer: 'Travis always had stories going in his head. From those monster stories to that long involved tale he'd been telling his cellmate last week; he couldn't stop the stories the way he couldn't stop breathing.' Charismatic, streetwise Travis is faced with a different set of values when he is sent to his uncle in the country after a series of violent incidents at home; he is challenged by the contact with new people (in particular two young women) and with horses - another of Hinton's passions. 'People will say it's autobiographical,' says Hinton, 'but it's not really. I had much more in mind the young actors I spent time with when I was making the films. It's about the struggle to get recognition, though when I heard my first book had been accepted I was in the same situation as Travis when he hears about his book, and, like Travis, I failed English the term I signed the contract for **The Outsiders**.

Writing Books, Writing Films

Lots of YA librarians were raving about Philip Pullman's **The Ruby in the Smoke** sequence. Philip writes in this issue (page 25) about another book **How To Be Cool**, recently adapted by him for TV. He, like Janni Howker (page 24), has become aware of what happens when a book is handed over to a different medium. Robert Cormier's books have been filmed but on his visit here he was more interested in talking about the writing process. Cormier Talking (page 12) and this issue's Authorgraph (page 14) give fascinating insights into the ways in which writers work. A new Zindel novel is always a literary event and reissues are always welcome especially when they have such eye-catching covers as the Collins Teen Tracks edition of **The Pigman's Legacy** featured on our cover. If the name Zindel didn't persuade a teenage reader to pick it up, this cover surely will. By chance we have stumbled on the news that there is a new BBC TV adaptation of **Tom's Midnight Garden**, scheduled (we think) to start this month. Makes you wonder why publishers employ people to tell the rest of us about media tie-ins when they remain so silent about what could be a major TV event for children's books.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Meanwhile we have 'the Cox report' on English 5-11. Not had so far, but we wait for 'more precise and more specific differentiation between levels' and 'greater emphasis on grammatical structure and terminology'. It will all hang on the assessment. It was fear of an even greater spread of decontextualised drilling that made us so keen to spread the word about **Rushavenn Time** (see page 4) and in particular the practice that lay behind it. Peter Woods is saying something very important about progression and reaching standards. At Brixworth School there's great emphasis laid on reading aloud and you can see it in the writing. **Tom's Midnight Garden** is a favourite. Philippa Pearce figures on Cox's 'by no means comprehensive' list of recommended authors. It's provided a lot of fun, hasn't it? Lots of obvious omissions as well as the contentious EB. But what a sloppy piece of work, and full of spelling mistakes! (The Js are 75% incorrect.) We made a few guesses but 'D Blackheath', not in Children's Books in Print, still eludes us. Any help? Let's hope the revised document improves and extends the list and then Mr Baker comes up with massive funding to get stocks into libraries and classrooms! Some hope!

Pat

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